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In *Period Living Beautiful English Cottages*, we showcase some of the most characterful period properties in the country, to help you capture this universally loved style in your own home.

The very word 'cottage' sums up cosiness and country charm. At its heart it is a look that is humble and the antithesis of ostentation, so avoid showy interiors and keep things simple. Invest in natural materials and handcrafted pieces, and mix newer finds with antiques and vintage for a truly eclectic home.

As well as serving as a visual guide, this book contains the full story of how each homeowner created their dream cottage, and all the important contacts to help you with your own project.

So, whether you are lucky enough to live in a bijou gem yourself, are planning a home-improvement project, or simply love cottage style, immerse yourself in this essential collection, where you'll find all the inspiration you need.

FUTURE

PERIOD LIVING Beautiful English Cottages

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TAPESTRY OF COLOUR

Built from the ancient stones of a ruined abbey, this pretty farm cottage has been transformed by owners Nick Wigg and Jenny Larvin to create a fitting backdrop for Jenny's handmade textile artworks

Words and styling Karen Darlow | Photographs Darren Chung

THE STORY

Owners Nick Wigg and wife Jenny Larvin live here with dog Gyp. Nick was a social housing consultant and Jenny, a qualified teacher, is now a textile artist and designs and makes quilts

Property A three-bedroom former farmworker's cottage near Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, built in around 1896

What they did The couple extended the property to create a spacious kitchen with a door onto the pretty garden. They also reconfigured the existing layout of the home to create a bigger dining room and an upstairs bathroom

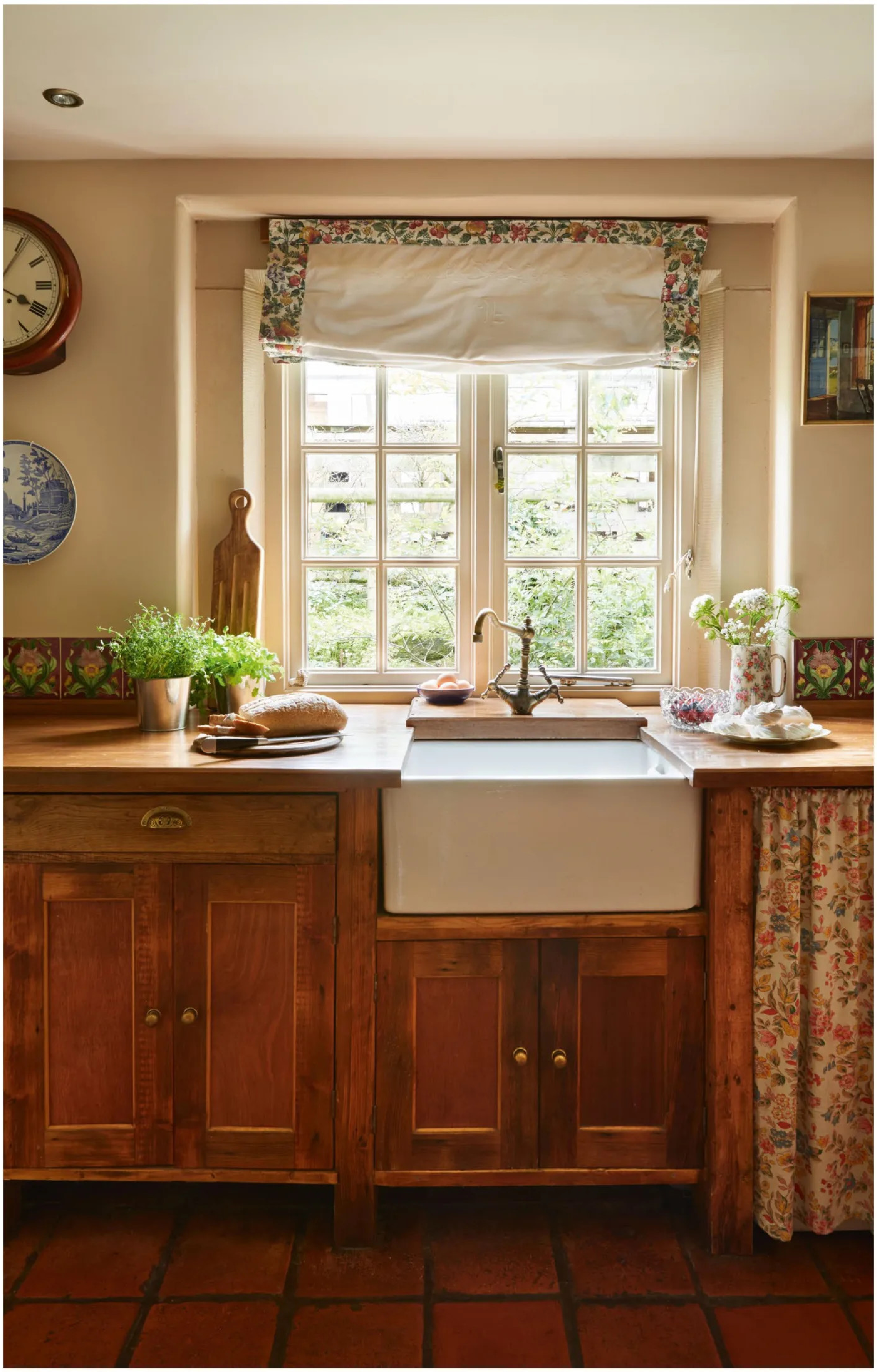
Together like the pieces of one of Jenny's exquisite handmade quilts, is in itself a work of art. Although it was, by husband Nick's admission, not very prepossessing when the couple first saw it. Its setting, in the shadow of a ruined Cistercian abbey, however, couldn't be better. The end cottage in a row of farmworker's homes in the heart of the Staffordshire countryside, with farm fields as far as the eye can see, it offered plenty of scope for a flower and vegetable garden, plus space for a croquet lawn – more on that later.

'I loved it straight away,' says Nick, 'but Jenny took some convincing because we'd been living in Alton where there was a real sense of community and this was really isolated.' Luckily for Nick, and for the little cottage, Jenny was won over by the wonderful living room, with its windows on two sides. Before the couple could contemplate relaxing on the sofa though, there was a whole lot of work to tackle, starting with the demolition of an ugly 1960s block and render ground-floor bathroom extension at the back of the house. 'We spoke to our daughter's friend Elizabeth Hackett, a young architect just starting out, and she came up with this wonderful plan with its jigsaw of gables all facing different ways, but fitting together brilliantly,' explains Nick. 'Adjoining the original house was an old coal house, with very deep foundations, so we took that down and reused the stone for the extension.' The stones in question are thought to have come from the abbey ruins, a local sandstone varying in hues from a dark pink, through terracotta to pale sandy shades, and were used to build most of the homes in this little hamlet.

Elizabeth's plans included a stone kitchen extension, breakfast room, porch and pantry, with an extra bedroom on the first floor and a new bathroom upstairs in place of one of the existing bedrooms. Because the cottage was so close to an ancient monument, the conservation planners wanted to call in an archaeologist. 'But Elizabeth put together a six-page archaeology methodology for dealing with ➤

Right: Essential for a country kitchen, but essential for warmth, too, the Rayburn is in use all year round and helps to dry washing on the rack above. The decorative old oak beam and quarry tiles came from a local reclamation yard. An Ercol chair in the corner of the room is draped with one of Jenny's intricate quilts

'This house is about how Jenny feels about her place in the world, and how she wants her surroundings to be, and that's firmly fixed in the Arts and Crafts movement'



Above: Nick built all the kitchen cabinets to Jenny's designs, drawing out their positions on the architect's plans for the extension. The decorative tiles around the sink are from Les Oakes & Sons reclamation yard. The couple found the butler's sink in architectural salvage yard, along with the taps. The walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Oxford Stone

Nick bought the Jotul stove from Ebay after the couple's first freezing Christmas in the house. The armchair was a local auction find to which Jenny added a handmade cushion. Nick built the bookcases, which are finished in Paint & Paper Library's Chelsea Green II. The wallpaper is Morris & Co's Scroll in Light Brick/Buff, originally designed in 1871 the footings' dig spoil and the build was allowed to go ahead,' says Nick.

The couple have tried to use as many recycled or freecycled materials as possible to reduce the carbon footprint of the building. 'Local stonemason Steve Holdcroft cut the huge square stone blocks laterally, doubling the number of stone facings to build the entire new set of walls,' says Nick. 'He also sourced small quantities of stone for the new windows and French window quoins, lintels and sills from nearby Hollington quarry, leftover from bigger jobs so at a good price, but it all matches and looks as though it's always been this way.'

The couple lived with their daughter nearby during the five-month build, then Nick set up camp in one room and completed the work, laying floors and moving stud walls to create new bedrooms.

'We then had to make a home from this shell of a building,' Nick says. 'We drew onto the plans, and I set to work making the things we wanted. For the kitchen, for instance, I started with a framework and stuff just grew. Pretty much everything you see in this house I built, all to Jenny's designs – everything from the panelling and floors, right through to the thunderbox toilet.'

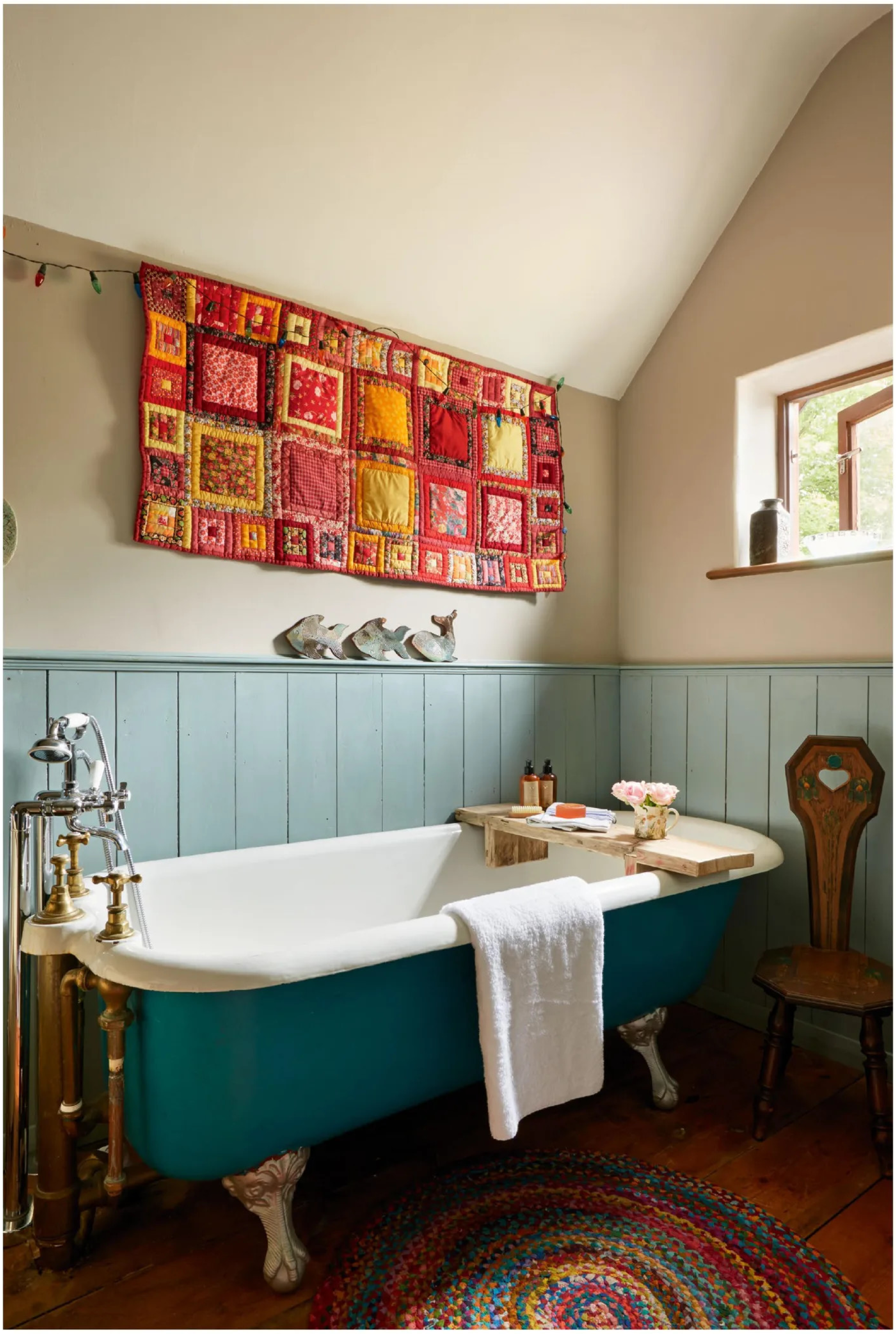
'What emerged was a style we dubbed "cottage baronial",' continues Nick. 'We thought that panelled wainscoting would suit the house, with its old oak beams (which we added) and gothic gables, but there was a practical advantage too in that it improved the insulation, and after one cold winter here that was a real bonus.'

'The finished look – the art, the quilts and the homely touches are all down to Jenny,' he adds proudly. 'This house is about how Jenny feels about her place in the world, and how she wants her surroundings to be, and that's firmly fixed in the Arts and Crafts movement, and it works brilliantly.'

Once the inside of the house was finished, Jenny and Nick turned to the garden, which needed pathways, flowerbeds, vegetable gardens and that all-important croquet lawn. 'We've always hosted a croquet party every year, in every place we've ever lived,' says Nick. 'So when the garden was finally ready for that, we knew we were home at last.'

Top: Jenny reupholstered the pretty bedroom chair
Above: The couple reconfigured the layout to create a larger dining room

In the living room, the couple added wainscot panelling, painted in Farrow & Ball's Smoked Trout. Nick bought the armchairs from a carpenter, where they were awaiting restoration. The doors at the side conceal a bottle rack for port, while a drawer conceals an ashtray. Jenny reupholstered them and added cushions. The table is an Ebay find and the clock is from Riley's repair shop in Cheadle



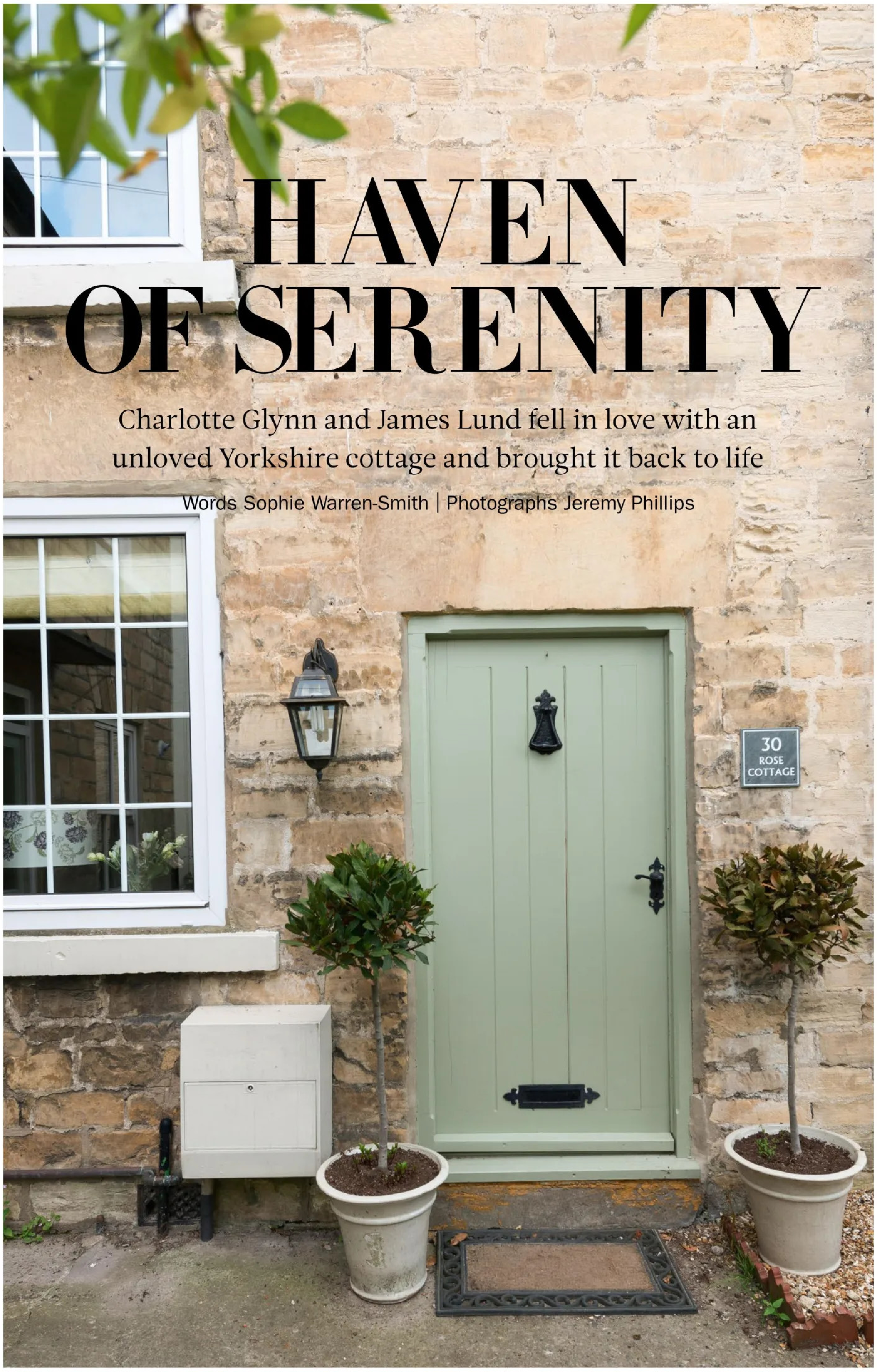
Above: Luckily the reclaimed roll-top bath arrived before the outside walls were finished so the couple's farmer son-in-law Paul lifted it in with his tractor and bale loader. The brass taps are original but don't work anymore, so Nick fitted freestanding taps. Mahogany tongue-and-groove panelling salvaged from a pub is painted in Dulux Duck Egg Blue, while Jenny's rag rug and quilt panel add extra colour
Opposite, clockwise from top left: The master bedroom, where Nick built the wardrobes using panels from an ecclesiastical robing cupboard. The wallpaper is Little Greene's Craven Street; a small bedroom for the grandchildren's visits; Nick also built the wooden thunderbox WC for the cloakroom. The Howzat wallpaper is by Linwood and the tiles were designed by Rachel Hoyle of HoyleArt Ceramics

Above: The summerhouse is Jenny's work room, where she creates her unique textiles
Right: The front of Nick and Jenny's farmworker's cottage remains exactly as it was in 1896, when it was first built using richly coloured sandstone from a ruined Cistercian abbey just down the lane. The combination of different shades of stone with the Staffordshire Blue tiled roof, and Nick and Jenny's cottage garden planting creates a pleasing contrast of textures as you approach the rural home

HAVEN OF SERENITY

Charlotte Glynn and James Lund fell in love with an unloved Yorkshire cottage and brought it back to life

Words Sophie Warren-Smith | Photographs Jeremy Phillips



Right: The couple wanted to create a country, cosy feel in the sitting room. The sofa was bought from Bhs, and the footstool is from Laura Ashley. The console table was found at an antiques shop and the stud lamps are from Homesense

THE STORY

Owners Charlotte Glynn, an accounts manager, and James Lund, an operations manager, who are intending to set up a business doing renovations and interiors
Property Believed to date back from the early 1800s, the two-bedroom cottage is not listed, but is situated in a Conservation Area in West Yorkshire
What they did The couple have renovated throughout and added a second bedroom

When Charlotte Glynn and James Lund started looking for their first home to buy together, they set their hearts on finding an old property that they could make their own. 'We saw this cottage online and it looked promising; however, when we first went to view the house we were taken aback by the condition of it,' recalls James. 'It had been left unoccupied for a long time and damp had really taken hold in the downstairs rooms, blowing a lot of the plaster. Almost every original feature seemed to be masked, it was cold, dark and unloved, but we immediately could see how it could look with some attention.'

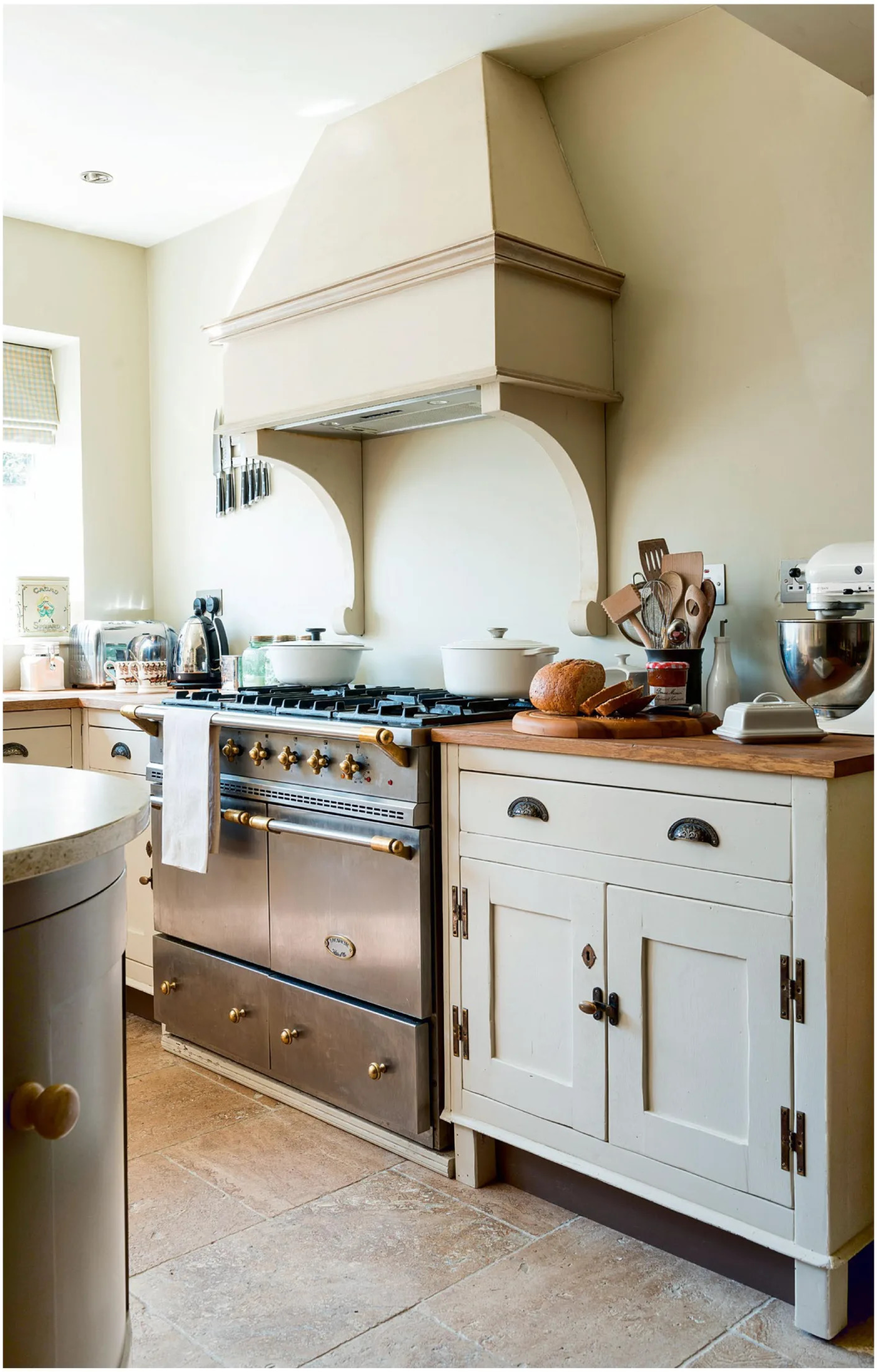
Deciding to take the renovating plunge, they bought the house and as soon as they got the keys, began the painstaking process of stripping off all of the damaged plaster – including unsightly pink Artex – from the walls. 'This is when we began to reveal the true beauty of the building,' says Charlotte. 'After getting the fireplace disconnected, James took great pleasure in ripping out the faux stone 1970s gas fireplace, which intruded into the room.' After a lot of work, a huge original stone fireplace was unveiled, which now makes a wonderful focal point in the room. The couple then brought in professionals to rewire the entire house, treat the timbers for wood boring beetles and install a damp-proof course.

'Very soon the house looked such a state with all of the work being done. Wires were hanging out all over, and any rotten timbers were removed, leaving just rubble on some floors,' says Charlotte. Everything was stripped out including the kitchen, old electrics and bathroom.

Charlotte and James had seen in the loft that there were beautiful A-frame beams above the bedroom, so they quickly made the decision to rip out the existing ceiling to expose the beams. Luckily they were able to stay with family while the project was completed, and although it was a messy job and a lengthy process to restore the beams, it was worth it, and this is now their favourite part of the cottage.

Once the rewiring and plumbing were far enough along, the re-rendering and plastering could begin. 'This was one of the most exciting parts,' says James. 'The local plastering firm we used were fantastic. They ➤

Right: The leather armchair is from the Burlington range at Laura Ashley and the blind is Mulberry Home's Oriana in Silver Leaf, from GP & J Baker



Above: Charlotte and James like to entertain so chose the generously sized Cluny 100cm range cooker by Lacanche. The white casserole dishes are by Le Creuset. The walls here and in the sitting room are painted in Old White by Farrow & Ball
Right: The bespoke dresser cleverly hides the fridge freezer and the boiler, as well as giving Charlotte and James extra shelving and cupboard storage

‘Keeping the flooring the same throughout the downstairs has really helped with creating a flow from the sitting room to the kitchen’ maintained all of the lintels we had uncovered, as well as the curves and eccentricities of the walls. The house really began to take shape once the plastering was complete; it was great to see the results of our hard work.'

Travertine stone flooring was then installed throughout the ground floor and upstairs they restored the original floorboards where possible and painted them in Farrow & Ball's Skimming Stone, which helps bring light into the rooms, whilst maintaining the authenticity of the cottage. 'Keeping the flooring the same throughout the downstairs has really helped with creating a flow from the sitting room to the kitchen. I'm really pleased with how it works,' says James.

During this period Charlotte and James began to make plans for the new kitchen and other cabinetry that they wanted. A local joinery company, Period Joinery, was recommended to them, and after a consultation the company soon got to work on creating the new bespoke oak exterior doors and indoor cabinets. 'To save money we chose to have these all delivered unfinished, and hand-painted them ourselves. It was time consuming, but saving money in areas like this meant that we were able to splurge on items such as the range cooker,' James explains.

Once the kitchen was complete and the new bathroom had been installed, they were able to start dressing the house and at last could move in. 'It was fantastic to finally take all of our possessions out of storage and start to enjoy making it our home,' says Charlotte. 'One thing we are both very proud of is how perfectly the cottage fits the way we live. We really tried to think about how we live and what we wanted for the space, and used this to inform all of our choices, including the lighting,' adds James.'A big priority for us was a kitchen and dining room where we could entertain, as we love having our friends and family over for dinner. I think that by focussing on how we would use the space at different times of the day, as well as making it a priority to retain the character of the building and use natural materials, was fundamental to the renovation.'

Another important aspect for Charlotte was investing in the best materials they could afford. 'Cheap paints and fabrics never have the same effect. I would rather wait to buy something in the sale than buy an inferior product. You live with these things every day, so it is well worth the investment,' she explains.

When it came to designing the interior, they both envisaged a home that would be a calming environment, while retaining a strong identity. 'We really wanted to create a home that flowed perfectly from one room to the next,' explains Charlotte. 'I didn't want a different feel in each room and wanted the type of colours that you would find in old faded floral fabrics: soft creams and greens and dusky greys.' They settled on a limited palette of powdery, matt paint from Farrow & Ball, which they have used throughout the entire cottage. 'We have mixed and matched with various shades to keep the look cohesive,' says Charlotte, 'and I also chose similar tones so that none 'jarred' against each other; that is also the advantage of using paint from one company, as invariably all of their colours sit well together.'

The couple wanted to create a welcoming home where guests would feel instantly at ease and comfortable, rather than anything that was too 'showy, where one doesn't know where to sit'. Charlotte chose pretty and feminine floral fabrics to add a printed element to the rooms and introduced lots of textures. 'I wanted to offset the matt quality of the walls with different textures through rugs and soft furnishings, and the kitchen units were left purposely with a 'natural' edge to them to create a contrast,' she explains.

Preferring interiors with an eclectic mix of antiques and modern furniture, the couple have used inherited pieces and antiques shop finds as the basis for room schemes. 'As it is our first house, we did make a few mistakes, but I think we've learned so much about our style,' says Charlotte. 'One thing I love about the cottage is how restful it is,' she continues. 'It really comes into its own during winter and is the perfect cosy cottage for cold nights.'

Right: The open-plan kitchen dining area creates a lighter feel; originally there was a big breakfast bar separating the dining and kitchen areas, with a WC taking up most of the dining space

> *'I wanted to use the type of colours that you would find in old faded floral fabrics: soft creams and greens and dusky greys'*

Above: Charlotte wanted to create a sophisticated bedroom scheme, so chose luxurious bedding and textured throws and rugs
Right: The feature bath is an antique passed down through the family. For a similar polished metal style, try Catchpole & Rye

WHEN TWO BECOME ONE

With an eye for a bargain, a practical mindset and lots of help from friends and family, Jenny and Mel Dunmow turned a pair of farm cottages into a stunning home

Words Karen Darlow | Photographs Darren Chung | Styling Sian Williams

THE STORY

Owners Jenny and Mel Dunmow, who are both retired engineers

Property Two Grade II-listed, 16th-century timber-frame Essex farmworkers' cottages, now combined into one home. The house has two staircases and two front doors

What they did The timber frame of the whole building was under threat from damp. Rewiring, replastering, replumbing and central heating were all required. An inglenook fireplace was uncovered during the renovations

There can't be many 14-year-olds who can kick down the living room wall and get away with it, but Jenny and Mel Dunmow's eldest son James did exactly that. 'He said "This wall, Mum?" Then he just put his foot on it and kicked it, and it was the first time we'd walked through from one cottage to the other without going out of the front door,' says Jenny.

That was 34 years ago. Since then, James, brother Stephen and many more members of the Dunmow family have all lent a hand to restore the two Grade II-listed timber-frame cottages, now joined into one pretty whitewashed house. However, there's no getting away from the property's former life: the twin staircases, and two sets of front doors and back doors, are an ever-present reminder, since the council wouldn't allow the Dunmows to remove them.

Back in 1980, their double trouble was the least of Jenny and Mel's concerns. Originally built in 1550 for Essex farmworkers, the two cottages had been empty for five years and the timbers were rotting from the ground up. So, before the sale had even gone through, the couple were hard at work.

'The old lady selling the house allowed us to come in and make a start. We emptied gallons of woodworm treatment over the bedroom floors,' says Jenny. 'We'd both do our day jobs, then come over to the cottages and work until 10.30 at night and all weekend to make it fit to move into.

'When Mel's mother saw that there was no water upstairs, no heating and no sockets, she said "Why on earth do you want to leave your lovely new home and live here?"' recalls Jenny. 'She thought we were making a huge mistake.'

Happily, Jenny's brothers-in-law – a plumber and an electrician – were more encouraging. 'We couldn't have done it without them. They got the property rewired and fixed up with central heating and running water, and charged us very little.'

Leaving the plumbing and electrics to the ➤

Right: Conker the cat arrived as a stray and is an excellent mouser. Mel used to play cricket and loves to collect old sports equipment

LEGEND

Above: Cooke & Lewis cupboards from B&Q are matched with reclaimed slate worktops and a reconditioned Aga
Right: The homely kitchen with its displays of antique china, a collection that started with an early Booths plate given to Jenny by her grandmother

family experts, Jenny and Mel continued with the structural work, turning to the local conservation officer for advice on repairing the decayed ground sills. They told us to cut out the rotten timbers to the same level all round the building and replace the missing sections with brick,' says Jenny. 'Unless you've got thousands, it's the only way to do it.'

The renovation was progressing nicely and the family were about to move in when disaster and good luck struck in equal measures. While Mel was out one day, Jenny decided to tackle an ugly fireplace in the main living room. 'I got out the chisel and I knocked my hammer on it, and the red tiled thing just fell over and behind it was a gap.'

This 'gap' was a magnificent inglenook fireplace, but whoever had put in the red tiled design had cut out a section of the main beam to prevent the coal fire burning through the wood. Late that evening they called a builder friend, who warned them 'the whole roof could be resting on that'. He returned the next day and jacked it up, while Jenny and Mel went to the reclamation yard to buy a beam and some bricks.

'It was full of bird's nests,' Jenny remembers, 'I was excited about the inglenook but worried, too, because I thought I'd made the house fall down.'

It didn't fall down, but instead slowly started to take shape. With the inglenook restored and the price of oil rising, a log-burner was a good choice for the living room. The reconditioned 1950s Aga in the kitchen, bought more recently, was converted from coal to oil. Alongside it sits a modern fan oven, cream country-style cabinets, plus a pine table and Victorian cupboard.

This casual juxtaposition of styles and eras, skip finds and antiques, is evident in other rooms and arose partly through necessity. 'With mortgage rates at 15 per cent and two young children, we couldn't afford to spend a great deal,' Jenny explains. 'You'll find an antique bed with high-street covers, or Seneshall cats alongside everyday accessories; a Burmese gong next to a painting rescued from a friend's garage – and it all works.'

Over the years the family has learnt to repair and renovate rather than replace things. 'The conservation officer said: "We like people like you buying houses, because you can't afford to gut it and get rid of things." But we would have dearly loved to replace the 1920s Crittall windows, and remove one of the front doors.' In the end, they simply pushed the piano up against one of the doors and learned to live with the windows.

Jenny is always on the lookout for a bargain and can usually find a place for other people's unwanted furniture and unusual accessories. Take the slate shelves in the kitchen and pantry, for instance, rescued from a skip at the local hospital, along with the parquet flooring in the home office; the fitted wardrobe in the main bedroom, made from a neighbour's folding library doors – 'very tricky to fit as the floors aren't level' – and the captain's swivel chair in their granddaughter's room, bought from Jenny's colleague for £30.

Mel collects chairs, so was delighted with those finds, although he hasn't sat down much in the past 34 years. He paints one side of the house each year with white Sandtex, does all of the gardening and is a dab hand at laying floors and bricks.

What would the couple say to someone contemplating a similar project? 'Think twice, because it's hard work,' says Jenny. 'You buy these old houses, do them up and you never have nice nails again,' she says with a twinkle in her eye.

'But of course it's got a lovely garden and we love it. We know we're lucky to be in it, because Essex farmhouses are very few and far between.' ●

Right: Jenny upholstered the gold chair herself, using curtain fabric given by her daughter-in-law. The wood-burning stove is from Villager

Above: Mel is a collector of chairs. This stick-back design cost £4 from a charity shop; the desk was a present from Jenny's cousin
Opposite: Jenny and Mel's granddaughter sleeps like a princess in this French bed from Sworders Antiques. The wallpaper is from B&Q and the grey bedlinen came from Dunelm

CONSERVING ITS INTEGRITY

Charlie Rayward has respectfully preserved the very best elements of his Cotswold cottage, and created an enduring family legacy along with it

Words and styling Samantha Scott-Jeffries | Photographs Nicholas Yarsley

This page and opposite: Charlie installed the Esse range and, with a friend, made the cupboards that conceal the white goods either side of the sink, using a solid piece of cedar to create a worktop. He and his dad found the kitchen table in a farm sale, and teamed it over time with mismatched antique chairs. The American wall clock belonged to his dad and has been in the kitchen for as long as Charlie can remember

THE STORY

Owner Charlie Rayward, who is a theatre technician
Property A four bedroom, two-bathroom Grade II-listed cottage in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. The oldest parts of the house date back to the 14th century
What he did Charlie stripped the house back to its more original state, rewired, replumbed and removed the black paint from the beams

Restoring The Knappings was always going to be much more than simply a renovation project for Charlie Rayward – this is the home that he grew up in as a boy, and so has known for most of his life. 'My parents bought the house in 1973,' explains Charlie. 'My dad was very much into self-sufficiency and we had a big vegetable garden and chickens – the grounds were bigger then,' he reminisces.

When Charlie's mother died, he renovated the barn that is in the grounds of the house to live in himself and to be close to his father. Then, in 2001, after his father passed away too, Charlie moved in to the house.

'Of course it looked very different inside then to how it does today,' he recalls of the interior that had changed very little since his childhood. 'In the 1950s and '60s, various owners had added studded walls to create more rooms and a modern fitted kitchen.' Charlie's aim, as he explains, was never to preserve any of the decoration or features from his childhood memories of the house, but rather to preserve the 'bare bones of it. I wanted to bring it back to a more honest, barer state: stripping the black paint off of the old beams, removing the later additions that were made to the place and breathing new life into it.'

This is not to underplay the extent of the work entailed in creating a far simpler interior with integrity. In fact, the house was the subject of an early episode of Channel 4's *Grand Designs*. Charlie appeared on the show with his then wife, and Kevin McCloud watched as they took the house back to its more original state. The couple camped in the garden and stayed at a friend's house while they worked on the interior.

Charlie remembers the endless stripping out, which the first stage of work demanded, to rid the house of its superfluous additions – from the fitted kitchen, to the built-in wardrobes and fitted carpets his dad had installed in the 1970s. Stud walls were removed so that the kitchen could be one large room – it had formerly been divided to create a utility room – and the small room that had been used as a pantry next door was repurposed as a study. ➤

Right: Created from the room that was once used as a pantry, the study would have once been the end of the house. Charlie has concealed some practical storage behind tongue-and-groove cupboard fronts

The wing back chair in the sitting room belonged to Charlie's father, and is covered with a throw from Johnstons of Elgin. The trunk has been in the house since Charlie was a boy, and he had the Knoll sofa covered in a fabric by Watts of Westminster. The flowers here and throughout are by Gather Me Flowers

THE CHRONICLE OF WESTERN COSTUME
ANATOMY FOR THE ARTIST

Maybe the most arduous part of the stripping work, however, was working on the many beams in the house, which had been painted with thick, sooty black paint in Victorian times. Charlie called on friends to help make light work of the job, while the cameras rolled to capture the process for the programme.

Next, Charlie installed the essentials for modern living. The house was rewired, replumbed and 'a green boiler and lovely new cast-iron radiators were installed.' Keen to preserve the fabric of the building, Charlie also had the terracotta tiled floors and wide elm floorboards cleaned and polished, windows were repaired, and doors rehung – one of which was found in the garden and was reinstated in its original place.

He preserved the original floors, which are wonderfully warped and wonky, and to allow the period lath and plaster walls to breathe, distemper and heritage colours with traditional pigments were used on the walls and beams. Charlie remembers craving 'an almost plain, pared-back look', to reveal the best features of the house and 'keep things simple', while his wife at the time wanted to decorate in 'a more colourful palette'. 'I think we came to a good compromise,' he explains.

By the time paint brushes were put down, the project had taken a year to complete, not without a last push for the final filming day 'reveal' for *Grand Designs*. Charlie again enlisted the help of friends 'with people everywhere helping: painting, cleaning windows, sewing', including Upstairs Downstairs in Cheltenham, who Charlie had asked to make curtains in heavy hessian, 'to go with the rustic feel of the place', as well as many other soft furnishings and curtains in the house.

'Bringing the house back to its original look felt like a good thing to do,' says Charlie of the results of his labour and those happy times. 'It wasn't altered in any major way; it still smells the same, of the wood, and has the same very nice feel. I think I felt a responsibility to do it this way, having had it passed down to me,' he adds.

Charlie has since spent more than a decade enjoying The Knappings, but now feels that it is finally time to move on. 'I do love the house, but my circumstances have changed,' he explains. 'I want a different life in Wales with my new partner,' he says of his imminent plans.

He admits that he will miss the feel of the house, which is full of so many fond memories, the fact he sleeps so well there, and using the workshop in the garden to work on odd jobs, repairs and hobbies. But he will also leave knowing that he has left the family home he has treasured for so many years, with its very best elements preserved for a new family to enjoy, hopefully for many generations to come.

Above: The bathroom suite is from Heritage Bathrooms
Above right: The mural in the bedroom has been painted as if it has been revealed in part
Below right: This charming guest room is now home to Charlie's grandmother's bed

The kitchen cabinets and island were designed and built by Four Corners for the new extension. A reclaimed pine surface from Peppermill Antiques tops the island, which has been painted in Farrow & Ball's Stiffkey Blue. Debbie bought the blue tiles as a job lot privately from Ebay. The large industrial-style lights in the kitchen were a bargain from Ikea, at £25 each

A NEW CHAPTER

An oak-frame kitchen extension and improved layout have transformed Debbie and Sarj Sarjant's 17th-century home

Words Victoria Jenkins | Styling Karen Darlow | Photographs William Goddard

THE STORY

Owners Debbie Sarjant, a journalist, and husband Sarj, a chartered surveyor, live here with their cat Betty Boo. Their six grown-up children no longer live at home

Property The four-bedroom cottage dates back to the 1600s. Its previous owners added a two-storey extension

What they did The couple rewired throughout, repaired the roof, fitted new windows and built a single-storey oak-frame kitchen-diner extension. The original kitchen is now a hall, cloakroom and open-plan study. The stairs were rebuilt and turned to face the new front door

Despite being confronted with its overgrown garden and poorly built extension, Debbie and 'Sarj' Sarjant felt a growing excitement as they viewed Bookend Cottage.

'There was no proper front door, one bedroom was bright pink and there was a total lack of wow factor,' says Debbie. 'But we loved the history, the honey-coloured stone and all the nooks and crannies.

'We were looking to downsize, and the cottage was smaller than our previous home but still had three floors and four bedrooms, so there was plenty of room for our grown-up children to stay.' That was in February 2015, and Debbie and Sarj went on to buy the cottage, living in rented accommodation while they tackled the renovation and extension.

The project's first and only major hurdle came when the couple applied for planning permission to add an oak-frame kitchen extension. 'We found out that we needed an archaeological watching brief because we're in the medieval heart of the village,' says Debbie. 'They didn't find a thing but it took 14 weeks before we could begin building.'

The magnificent new kitchen-diner is now the heart of the cottage, and the couple have also improved the older two-storey extension and modernised the original cottage. 'The old extension had been built in 2000 but still needed rewiring, replumbing and replastering,' says Debbie.

After demolishing a ramshackle lean-to, the first job the builders tackled was tanking the living room and old kitchen in the cottage and the new sitting room in the extension. 'Just a week after we'd bought the place, a mysterious puddle of water appeared in the living room, which we think came from the flooded road,' says Debbie. Next, they levelled the floors and installed underfloor heating.

'We also had to get rid of the damp that was coming up through the floor and down from the leaking roof,' says Debbie. 'In ➤

Right: The double Belfast sink is from Four Corners, with a tap from Fountain Softeners. The flooring is from Cotswold Wood Floors. With no gas supply in the village, Debbie chose an electric Everhot range

The dining room reminds Debbie of a ski chalet, and features a pine table and leather chairs from Peppermill Antiques. Rural Timber Window Company supplied the windows and joiner James Chandler made the window seat. The crockery is by Burleigh

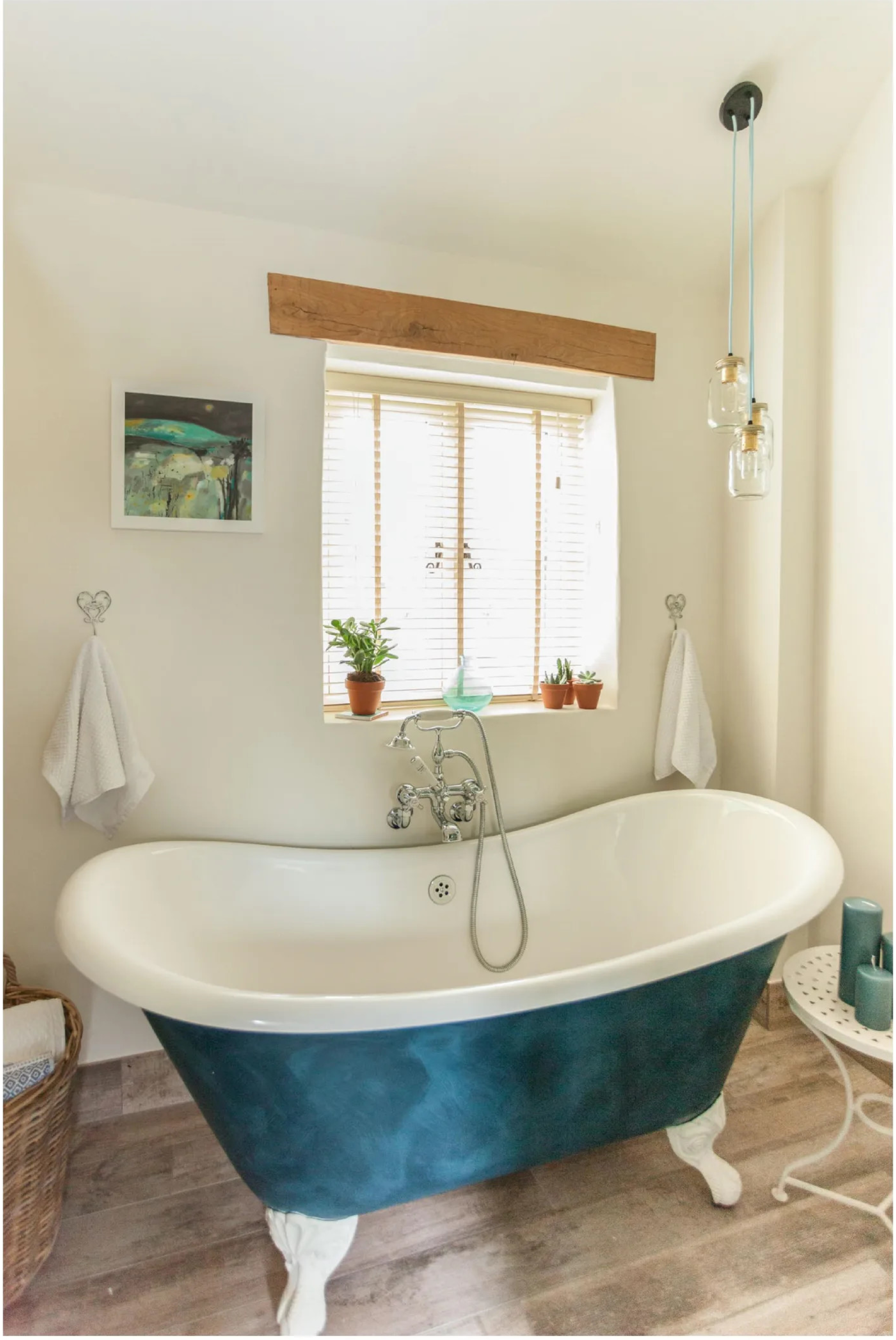
addition, we replaced the windows and, because the cottage isn't listed, we were able to change its layout to improve the flow of the property.'

They created a much-needed cottage porch entrance where a kitchen window used to be. Before that, entering the 'front' door had involved taking a winding path through the back garden to one of five fully glazed doors. 'We've made good use of the old kitchen space, turning it into a hall and cloakroom with an open-plan study area,' says Debbie. 'We've also swapped one of the three bathrooms with a bedroom for better access and refurbished them all.' Then, as all the original rooms had such low ceilings, Debbie and Sarj removed some of the doors downstairs to create more of a flow-through.

In total, the project took just nine months to complete, and the couple are delighted with the results. 'I'm particularly pleased with the kitchen, which was designed and built locally,' Debbie says. 'The new room has given us exactly the large, light, modern space we needed, and it's where we eat, talk and entertain.

'And the great thing about downsizing is that it was a chance to replace a lot of our furniture. I gave the house a backdrop of soft white walls, which enabled me to have fun with colour in each room. Now it's a lovely warm and welcoming home.'

Located in the original 17th-century part of the cottage, the living room had to be tanked due to flood water getting in. The previous owners installed the stove; for similar, try Chesney's. The yellow Grand Bovary chair, Square Dimple footstool and Jonesy sofa, all from Loaf, add a pop of colour. Debbie has had the pippy oak coffee table for a long time, and the large lamp is from Oka. Blinds and curtains throughout are from the Curtain Emporium in Blackwell



Above: An Albion Bath Company slipper bath is painted in Annie Sloan's Aubusson Blue
Above right: The master bedroom is located in the two-storey extension built by the previous owners. Debbie and Sarj have added French windows and a Juliet balcony. The sleigh bed is by Willis & Gambier, and the armchair was inherited from Debbie's grandparents
Below right: This pretty guest room was once painted bright pink with a tiny basin jammed under the eaves, and had a leaking roof. A new Loaf bed is topped with a bedspread from Greengate. The cushions and antique nursing chair are covered in Victorian fabrics

Flora

IN FULL BLOOM

Using floral prints and a pastel palette, June Willison and Barry Monk have turned an unloved Victorian conversion into a charming country-style home

Words Katie Treggiden | Photographs Bruce Hemming
Styling Sally Maton

Bread
SUGAR
KITCHEN

The country-style kitchen features cabinets in Farrow & Ball's Shaded White, oak worktops and a freestanding unit from local antiques shop Mark Maynard, with blinds made up in Cath Kidston fabric

THE STORY

Owners June Willison, who runs vintage and antique furniture business, Cloudberry Home, and Barry Monk, a marketing consultant, live here with daughter Louisa and tabby cat Summer
Property A three-bedroom semi-detached Victorian house converted, together with its neighbour, from three cottages in the 1980s
location Crouch, near Sevenoaks in Kent
What they did The property was in reasonable condition, so work was undertaken to add character and to make the space work better for a family. The couple replanned the ground floor space to improve the flow and add storage and a new bathroom upstairs

When June Willison, her partner Barry and their two children moved into their new home in Kent, there were some extra members of the family to take into account before any renovations could begin. As if moving house wasn't stressful enough, the family cat, Summer, had given birth to a litter just a few weeks before. 'The first thing we did was to ensure the cat and her four kittens were safe and secure in the summerhouse,' recalls June, before starting the project to make the three-bedroom Victorian house work for their family.

The property had been converted in the 1980s, together with the house next door, from three tiny cottages, and was in good shape structurally. However, the house lacked character. 'It felt dated and the rooms didn't flow well,' says June. 'But I knew it had potential.' The couple decided to redesign the ground floor, swapping the kitchen and breakfast room to create a more family-friendly kitchen-diner, with an L-shaped run of units and appliances. 'My brother had a kitchen company at the time, which was great as he already knew our taste,' she adds.

As the kitchen was the biggest part of the renovation, the couple set up a temporary one in the living room while the work was being done. 'It was challenging with builders, plumbers and electricians all vying for space – there was just so much mess,' explains June. 'But it was all worth it, because the kitchen is now our most used space – homework, sewing, socialising and cooking all happen here – and it's definitely my favourite room.'

Returning some features to the period property was important to June, who runs ➤

Above right: The chairs around the Victorian wind-out table are junk shop finds, which June has painted in Farrow & Ball's Off White. The seats are covered in pretty fabric offcuts
Below right: The hall was the living room of one of the original cottages, and is big enough to double as a study. Matching lamps on top of the French console are from Biggie Best, with a mirror from Nutley Antiques

CAKES
TEA

MOTORING and TOURING

Summer the cat sits on an Edwardian chair reupholstered in soft red ticking, which provided the inspiration for the room scheme. The wood-burning stove creates a focal point, with the wooden mantel above and alcove shelf filled with vintage accessories from June's antiques business, Cloudberry Home

her own vintage and antique furniture business, Cloudberry Home. 'We moved into a fairly characterless home and systematically went through giving it our own style,' she says. Previous owners had removed the fireplace in the dining area, so the couple added a chimney breast where it would have been, lining it with reclaimed French bricks. The space is now used to store logs for the wood-burner next door, and the newly created alcoves display June's collection of vintage enamelware and spongeware.

The living room presented more of a challenge. 'Although there was a wood-burner, it was off-centre, making the room look unbalanced,' explains June. 'By centring it and building a chimney breast around it, we added a focal point, but in the right place.' An oak beam and wooden mantel add further interest. 'Our neighbour is a builder, so he plastered both chimney breasts with a rough finish,' she says. 'We asked him not to plaster them too evenly and to keep the corners rounded to achieve a more cottage-like feel.'

June and Barry replaced the downstairs carpets with engineered oak boards, which visually connect the ground floor. 'I think this was one of the best things we did,' says June. 'Oak is very forgiving, so it's perfect for children and pets.' They put in stripped pine half-glazed doors, with double doors between the kitchen and living room. 'We had used half-glazed doors in a previous house and liked the way they increased the feeling of light and space,' she adds.

The couple commissioned a local joiner to build fitted cupboards, combining shelving and hanging space, in the master bedroom, with chicken-wire fronts lined with ivory muslin. 'The joiner was somewhat bemused by the chicken wire,' says June. 'But he did agree it looked nice in the end.' June and Barry then painted the cupboards and the room itself, creating one 'finished' space into which they could retreat from the renovations downstairs.

The whole house has been decorated in a muted colour palette of off-whites, greys and blues. 'We wanted to keep it light and airy,' explains June, who was inspired by rustic French interiors. 'We are surrounded here by breathtaking countryside, so we wanted to create the feeling of being at one with nature and the changing seasons.' One piece of soft furnishing often gave the couple the starting point for a room's whole scheme, and they decided on the interior ideas together. 'I tended to source the individual pieces to fit the scheme,' says June, 'and Barry tended to like them!'

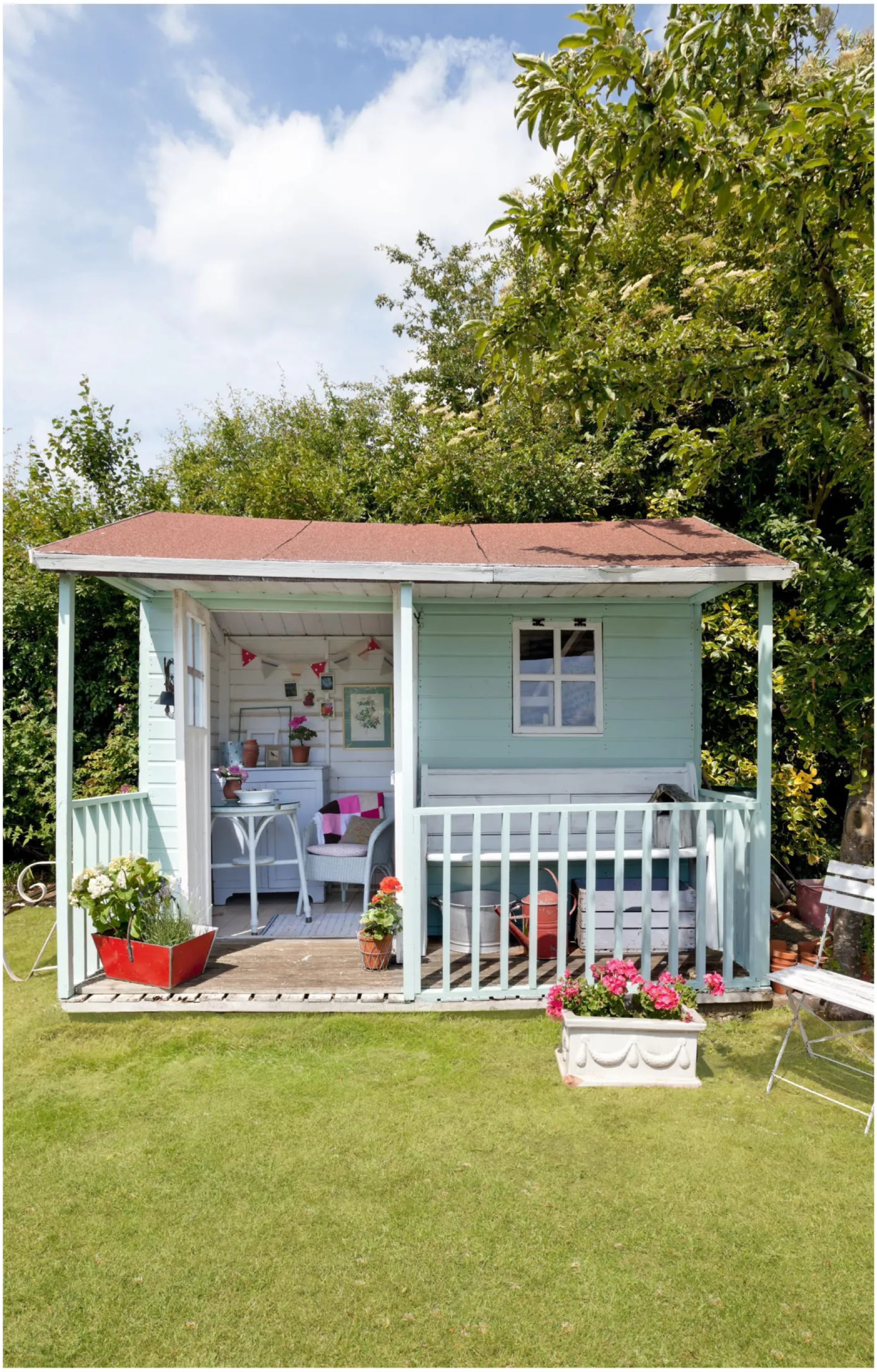
Once the internal work was done, their thoughts turned to the outside space. 'Redesigning the garden was the part of the project I enjoyed most,' says June. 'It had a confusing layout with lots of paths, a large pond and exotic planting, so we simplified it into a pretty country garden with a central lawn. It was a real labour of love.' A summerhouse, originally conceived as a playhouse, now serves as a base for June's business, where she paints furniture and restores vintage pieces for sale. 'It's also a lovely quiet, tranquil spot for a glass of wine,' she says. A vegetable plot alongside enables Barry to join June in the garden. 'We love the garden,' she says. 'It has real country charm.'

Almost 10 years on from the original renovations, the couple finally have the bathroom they always wanted. Overlooking farmland, it was originally one of the cottage's bedrooms. 'The size seemed indulgent,' admits June, 'and we thought about dividing it to create a separate shower room, but in the end we decided we liked having one large bathroom.' Adding a new basin with integrated cupboard has created extra storage, while the tongue-and-groove panelling gives character.

With their youngest daughter about to head off to university, the couple already have their eye on their next project, so are planning to sell up and move on. 'We've done what we set out to do – to create a homely and warm, family-friendly cottage,' says June. 'And we have all really enjoyed living here.'

Above right: The décor in the master bedroom has been kept simple so as not to detract from the views. Bedside tables from Mark Maynard are painted in Shaded White, while the walls are in Wimbourne White, all by Farrow & Ball. The plain roller blind is from John Lewis and the French linen panels are from Biggie Best

Below right: June chose a calming palette for the bathroom, adding panelling in Farrow & Ball's Light Blue; the Lloyd Loom chair was an Ebay find. The Cow Parsley roller blind is from John Lewis and the towel ladder from Cloudberry Home. Hooks from Homesense complete the fresh, nautical theme



Above: Originally a playhouse for their youngest daughter Louisa, the summerhouse is now home to June's business, and is filled with antique and car boot sale finds. June has adorned the walls with vintage seed packets and bunting

THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Experienced renovators David and Angy Bovill combined their talents in architecture and horticulture to make the restoration of their 17th-century Cotswold stone house their most successful – and rewarding – project yet

Words and styling Charlotte Colville | Photographs Brent Darby

Everything in the garden is Angy's creation, from the structure to paths, plants and climbers. It is her pride and joy and a work of art that, with David and Will's help, she has perfected over the past three years. The top level is devoted to plants and beauty and the bottom level is a vegetable plot

THE STORY

Owners David Bovill is an architectural and planning consultant, and Angy is a garden designer, and the head of horticulture and countryside management and teacher of horticulture at a local school. They have two sons, Will and Ed

Property Originally two worker's cottages built in the 1650s, in Oxfordshire

What they did The house was inhabitable when the couple bought it, so they stripped it back and added almost everything from scratch

David Bovill sat with his head in his hands in the overgrown nettle bed of a garden, one May morning in 2011, the first time he visited the utterly tumbledown and derelict cottage that his wife Angy had set her heart on. It was not that David, an architectural consultant, was daunted by the amount of work needed on the house – the couple had already renovated some five dilapidated properties – but David was after a different type of project this time round, preferably a new-build eco home.

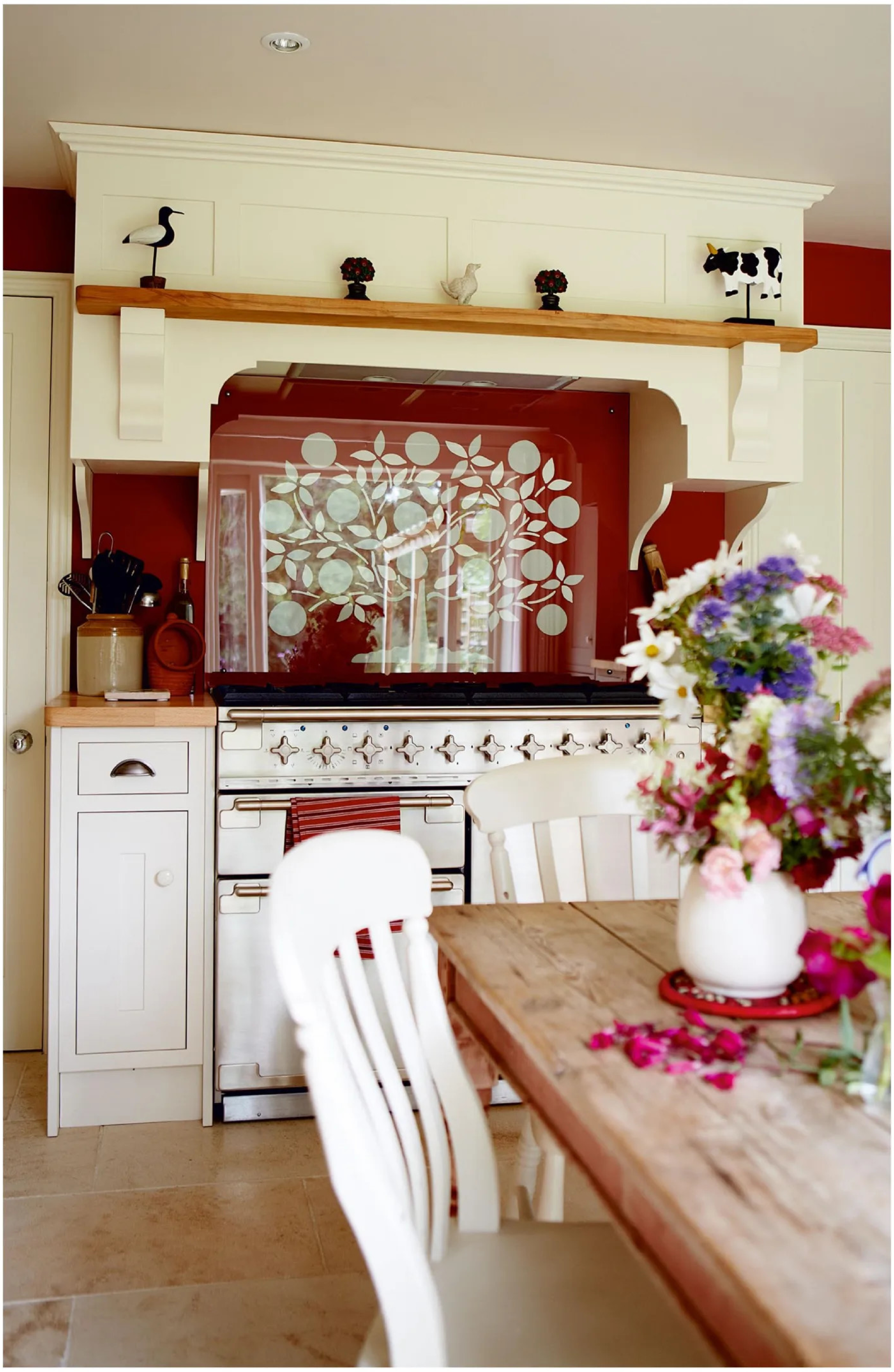
Seeing his wife, an expert horticulturist and garden designer, glowing with excitement at the potential of the house and in particular its gardens, he realised that his eco home was not to be and his resolve began to thaw. Grudgingly he admitted that the south-facing Cotswold stone house, originally two workmen's cottages dating back to the 1600s, with its sunny and sheltered – if overgrown – garden, had a certain charm. Its position was hard to beat, overlooking an idyllic valley in which lambs leaped among the buttercups on that spring day, and a river rushed by beyond. This, however, was where the charm ended.

'First impressions of the interior were not encouraging,' admits Angy. 'For a start the front door was rotten and hanging off its hinges, and would take the gentlest of nudges to collapse altogether.' Almost all of the other doors throughout the house were missing, the windows were mainly cracked or caving in, walls were crumbling, and the floorboards were rotten throughout. One staircase was dilapidated and the other missing, there was no kitchen and no running water apart from into one bath that was barely plumbed in, and water soaked the floor.

On paper it was not a dream home, but the seed had been sown and a desire to restore this threadbare home to its former glory had captured David and Angy's hearts. So just two months after their initial visit, they moved in.

Although the majority of the house was uninhabitable, there was a one-up one-down middle section that was dry and safe. It had been added in 2001 by a previous owner to link together the two 17th-century cottages: a tiny thatched dwelling and a ➤

Right: The table and wall cabinets are 'upcycled' treasures from antiques markets and junk yards



Above: David built the mantel above the range cooker. The wall stencil is from The Stencil Library and the red paint is Farrow & Ball's Incarnadine
Right: Angy painted the kitchen chairs found on Ebay after attending an Annie Sloan painting course. The curtains are made up in Panama Rouge fabric by Annie Sloan

larger stone cottage. Thankfully the upstairs room was habitable, so the Bovills set up camp in this room and installed a temporary kitchen and toilet in the smaller cottage below. Then with the help of their son Will, and various friends and workmen, they set to work.

They gutted the house from top to bottom, stripping ancient walls back to make good for replastering. They started from scratch, adding new plumbing and electricity throughout, had new windows fitted, and rethatched the smaller cottage to make the roof watertight. A new staircase was added in the gaping space where once a staircase had been, and rotten floorboards and concrete floors were taken up to refloor throughout. 'Many a Bovill foot or knee fell through the ceilings, and we made some interesting discoveries,' says Angy. 'While wrenching up the concrete floor in the sitting room to install underfloor heating, we found dozens of agricultural fertilizer bags beneath, presumably a makeshift damp-proof course.'

They also discovered a huge pile of moss-covered limestone tiles abandoned in a garage. They scrubbed them down, measured them up and concluded that they could be used to floor the whole of the downstairs.

Another task was to strip and sand the sitting room beams. 'It was not a job for the faint hearted, which was ironic,' quips David, 'because within weeks of moving in I found myself in hospital with endocarditis, a life-threatening heart disease.' This came as a serious blow, but thankfully he made a full recovery, having spent two months in hospital drawing up further plans for the house.

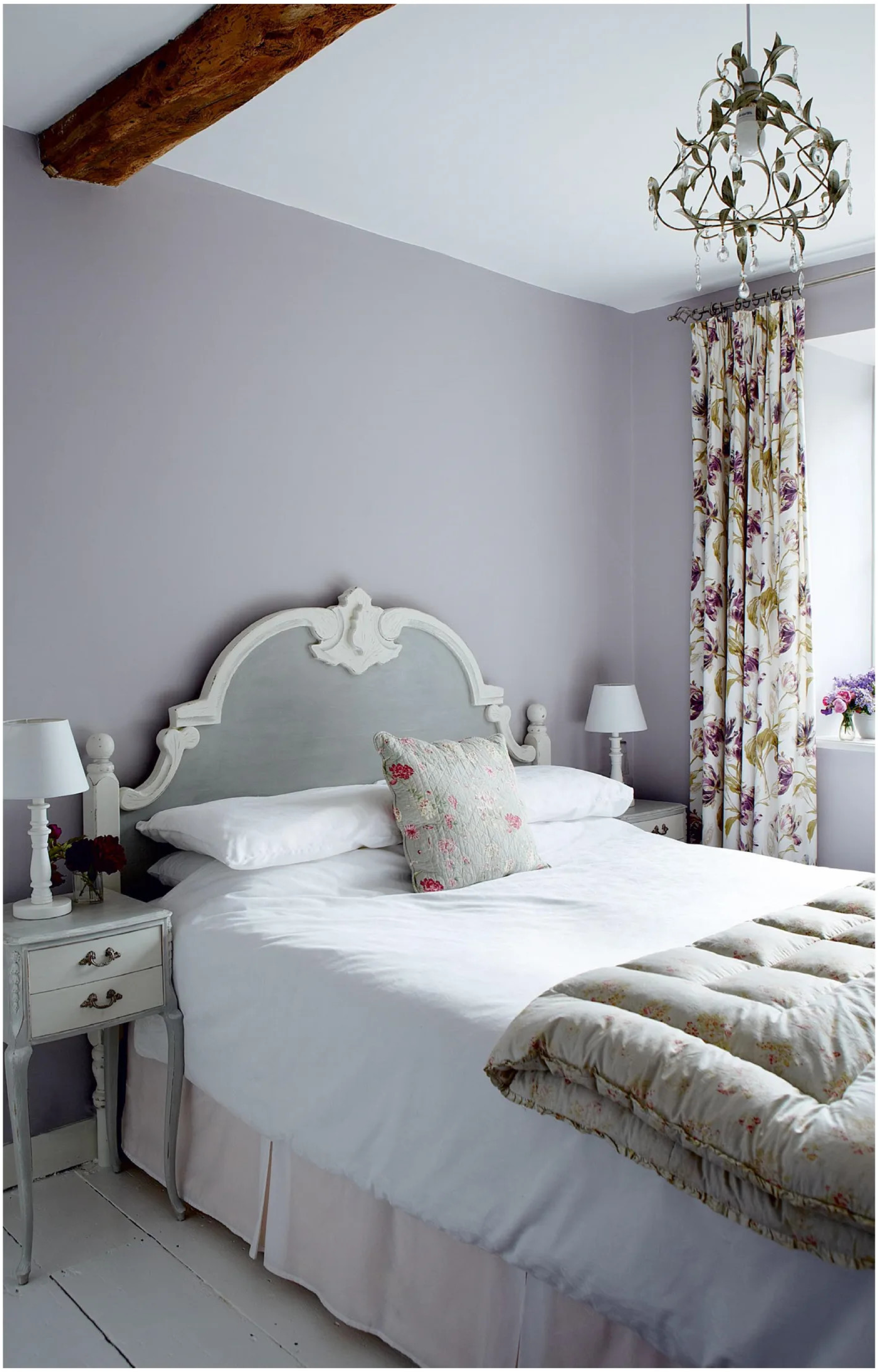
With summer now coming to a close, Angy and Will split their time between the house restoration and work on the garden. Aside from its wonderful aspect, it held little allure. 'It was full of the most pernicious of weeds: nettles, thistles and docks,' says Angy. Between Will's strimming and her weed killing, however, they cleared the garden to a blank canvas. They dug borders and put up trellis, gravelled a path and repaired crumbling walls ready for the garden to be planted in the spring.

By late autumn, with David back in the fold, the house was ready for decorating, a process which took a year in total. The family started at the top of the house and worked downwards, beginning with a bedroom and en-suite shower for Will in the attic. The guest bedroom was soon finished, which was followed by the sitting cum dining room, complete with underfloor heating, original beams, new wood-burner and antique fireplace. The kitchen was complete for Christmas that year.

Angy had always dreamed of having a big, French inspired bathroom, which was finally realised three years ago. This was the last vital element to the house, and gave the family all the living space they needed. However, they are a tireless pair, and have plenty more projects to do before their home has fulfilled its potential.

The far end of the house still tells the tale of the its previous state, and is a reminder that only a few years ago David Bovill had buried his head in his hands and realised that his vow never to take on another restoration was not to be.

Top right: The Bovills uncovered a chimney in the corner of the dining room and found a fireplace in a shop in Sheffield that perfectly fits the spot. The table and chairs are from Fifichic
Right: In the sitting room the sofas are from Sofa Sofa and the console table is from Station Mill Antiques. The curtains are made from Hydrangea fabric by Laura Ashley



Above: The charming guest bedroom is French inspired. Angy painted the bedhead from Cotswold Pine, while the bedside tables cost 50p each from Shipston on Stour Recycling Centre
Right: David had just started making a built-in vanity for the bathroom when Angy fell in love with an antique unit from Burgess Reclamation in Croughton, into which the couple fitted these twin basins

Sophie and Bobbie water the plants in reclaimed tin baths, dolly tubs and terracotta pots. Edward made the table and decking outside the family's home, a former pigsty. For more details of Edward's craft, visit his website, ed-wood.work

A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Christina and Mark Strutt's Somerset estate has evolved from a home into studios, a workspace, a communal family hub and the design inspiration for more than six generations

Words Hannah Newton | Photographs Solesbury & Worthy

THE STORY

Owners Christina Strutt, designer, author and founder of fashion and homeware store Cabbages & Roses, and her husband Mark, a retired land agent, live here. Their son Edward, a woodsman, forester, and furniture-maker, and his wife Sophie, a garden designer and mosaic artist, live on the estate with their children, Frankie, five, and Bobbie, two, along with Jack Russell Walter Gilbert

Property A Grade II-listed, 15th-century mill cottage, set in hundreds of acres of rolling Somerset hills

What they did The main house had been divided in two, so Christina and Mark put it back together, relocating the kitchen. A former pigsty was made into an annexe, where Edward and his family now live

Family is central to the way the Strutts live, and the cornerstone to their inspiration and work. Six generations of Strutts have lived in this picturesque heart of rural Somerset and today three generations live and work together on this ancient, fertile land.

Designer, author and founder of fashion and homeware store Cabbages & Roses, Christina was just 24 and a journalist at British *Vogue*, when Mark – now her husband of 36 years – took her to his grandparents' estate. The wild, expansive gardens, babbling brook and honey-coloured hues of the Cotswold stone cottages soon captured the London girl's heart and the couple moved into the main house when they married in 1980, bringing up their children, Kate and Edward, there.

The estate has gradually evolved to suit the family's needs. In the mid-1980s, Christina wanted the kitchen space to be the heart of the home, so they decided to uproot it from its original spot and relocate it to the former sitting room. The vast kitchen now boasts a large fireplace, an Aga, a long wooden table and dressers groaning with crockery, while the old kitchen has become a cosy snug.

More recently their son Edward built the pavilion where the families spend summer evenings sharing food and taking in the sounds of the countryside. The annexe, where he lives with wife Sophie and their children, Frankie and Bobbie, was originally a pigsty but was renovated by Mark in the mid-1990s.

Edward has a workshop and timber yard within the estate and loves this beautiful setting close to his family. 'Watching nature and the weather refreshes my mind when I'm working with a tricky piece of wood,' he says. 'My heart belongs to this valley and I'm so happy my children can experience it as well.' ➤

Opposite: At the far end of the kitchen, a dresser provides more storage for china, teapots and old glass. For a similar pendant light, try Skinflint

Christina and Mark decided to move the kitchen into the centre of the home many years ago. With its rustic table, huge fireplace and gallery display of artwork above, it makes a relaxed space for cosy family meals. The chair cushions are from Cabbages & Roses. Walls are painted in Off White and woodwork in Old White, both Farrow & Ball

Nigel Slater
EASY READ BRITAIN

Just as Mark and Christina created new spaces for their family in the 1980s and '90s, Edward has made his mark, crafting bunk-beds, shelves, decks, and as many flat areas as he can for wife Sophie to arrange her plants on. Since marrying into the family she has redesigned the estate gardens. 'The tranquility here inspires my whole way of life, giving me the space to play with plants and create ideas for gardens that I use elsewhere,' says Sophie.

Christina's fashion and homeware brand Cabbages & Roses is eccentric, classical English and internationally respected, but nowhere expresses her style more clearly than her own home. 'I have a deep love of pink, china and old prints, but I don't believe in deciding on a look and going out to find it; I get drawn to one thing and the room grows organically around it,' says Christina. Scouring antiques fairs and junk shops is one of her real pleasures, and there is a magpie nature to the myriad collections both inside and outside. 'I collect and hoard treasures, which I find difficult to dispose of but they all eventually find a place,' she adds.

Living Life Beautifully is Christina's latest interiors book, and her home and extended family's lifestyle absolutely reflect this vision. 'I have always believed that homes need to be filled with more than just lovely things. To be really beautiful, they must be lived in, with the things complementing the human stories that run through them.'

Right: The former parlour kitchen was transformed into this snug living room when Christina created the big family kitchen in the mid-1980s. Vibrant soft furnishings in co-ordinating raspberry pink stripes and florals from Cabbages & Roses create an air of easy comfort, while piles of antique books and interior design volumes, and ancient paintings and prints ensure that there's always something interesting to look at in this cosy winter den

VINTAGE CHIC
DRAWING FASHION
PRESTEL
TIM WALKER PICTURES

Above left: Edward and Mark converted the loft above the workshop several years ago, turning this bright space, with its views over the garden and woodland, into a comfortable en-suite bedroom. For similar armchairs, try The French Bedroom Company

Below left: In the master bedroom, antique paintings handed down through the family create a relaxed contrast with the fresh floral and checked linens from Cabbages & Roses. The curtains are in the company's Constance Raspberry print. A gothic arch leads to Christina's dressing room

Above: The beautiful summer pavilion was designed and built by Edward, while Sophie's tree-house design studio can be seen in the distance, hidden under the ancient oak tree Edward climbed as a child

SEC
D 83

Surrounded by the wild gardens that inspired so many of Christina's designs for Cabbages & Roses, the pavilion is the family's summer living space. The tablecloth is Hatley Pink, one of the company's trademark faded floral prints, complemented with blousy posies of garden flowers. The chairs and candlesticks are family antiques

Beanstalk Cottage, with its Gothic windows and flint walls, is located in a quiet part of rural East Sussex

SHEPHERD'S DELIGHT

A picturesque flint cottage, nestling against the South Downs, is where Caroline Fuller has created her dream home and garden

Words Jo Peters | Photographs Fiona Walker-Arnott | Styling Heather Gratton

THE STORY

Owners Caroline Fuller, who runs Beanstalk Tea Garden, lives here with her husband David. They have nine horses, three dogs, three pigs, two goats, a cat, two peacocks, chickens and ducks
Property An 1870s cottage, previously converted from two shepherds' cottages, in Firle, East Sussex
What they did Created from two cottages, there are two staircases, two reception rooms – now the living room and dining room – and two front doors. The couple have redecorated, updated the bathroom, and converted an outbuilding into a kitchen for the tea gardens, and a shed into a bedroom

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The house was part of the Firle Estate in East Sussex and had been converted from two shepherds' cottages into one long before the couple moved in, though they are occasionally reminded about the building's history by its previous tenants: 'People knock on the door to tell us that they rented it as long as 50 years ago, when it had outside toilets and no running water or electricity,' says Caroline. Fortunately, the house had been rewired before they moved in, while many original features remained, such as its distinctive Gothic arched windows. Heating is now provided by an oil-fired boiler, although the cottage has open fires in the living and dining rooms, which are often lit.

While the cottage's unusual history and dimensions give it a distinct and quirky character, the low ceilings and door frames did present a challenge, as Caroline explains: 'Between what was originally the central wall dividing the two cottages, there was a cupboard – it's now a doorway, but you need to be under 5ft3 to enter without banging your head. This is also where the two staircases are located – one has a latch door down to the living room, and on the other side you drop down into the dining room.' With a layout like this, one of the main concerns was getting large items of furniture into the house – the couple's brass bed, for example, had to be put together on site.

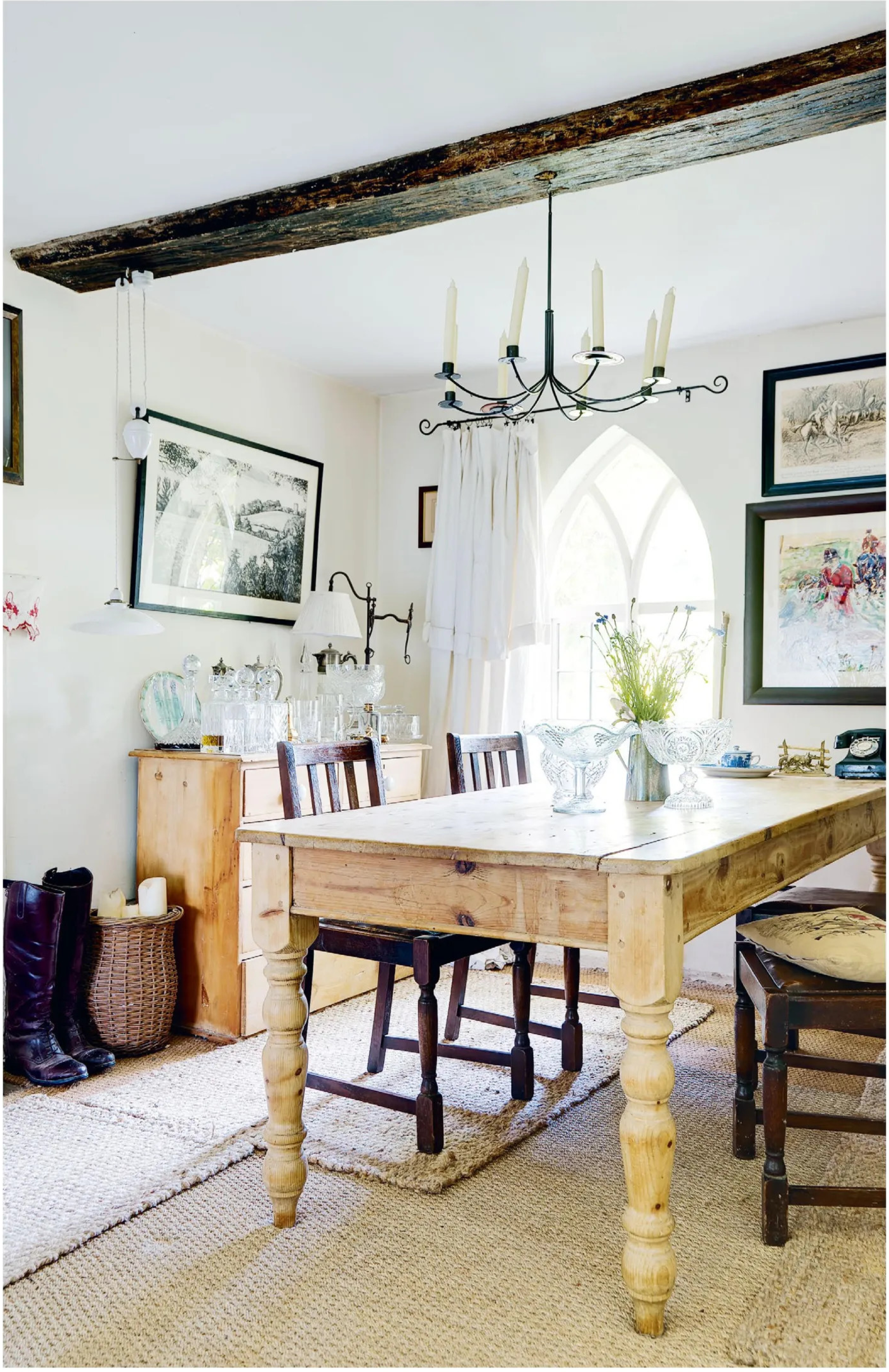
Caroline and David decorated the cottage themselves, filling it with their extensive collections of art, furnishings and accessories. Caroline loves Edwardian country style, 'but definitely not vintage or shabby chic' and, apart from some well-chosen fabrics or art, there are few contemporary pieces in the cottage. She admits that she can't go on holiday anywhere without bringing back a stash of items for the house. Nearby Lewes also offers an infinite treasure trove.

Perhaps the only downside to the historic property is that the galley kitchen is on the small side, so within a year of moving in, the couple converted one of the outbuildings into a commercial kitchen, to service Caroline's garden café. They kept the original kitchen for their own use, however, decorating it with garlands of hops all round the walls and over the Gothic arched windows, blurring the boundaries between the cottage and garden.

Caroline loves spending time in the garden and has stocked it with fruit trees and traditional cottage plants. She also uncovered a Victorian well, which previous occupants had relied on for drinking water. 'The water is clean enough to drink from but we mostly use it for irrigating the garden,' she says. Thanks to Caroline's skilled plantsmanship, the garden in its stunning setting, with views of Firle Beacon, has long attracted attention. 'Before, passers-by would peer into the house and the garden so we decided to open the tea garden, so they could stop and enjoy it,' says Caroline.

While the couple are delighted with their rural home, they admit that living in an isolated location isn't for everyone. 'You need a four-wheel drive for access in the winter, it's open to the elements, and you really have to be a country person to live here,' says Caroline. 'Luckily, we are pretty hardy!'

Right: Caroline loves to spend time in the garden, where edible flowers grow on one side, and a wild meadow on the other



Above: Caroline's antique glassware softly reflects the light in the dining room. The pine table is from Eastbourne Antique Centre and the oak chairs from Emporium Antique Centre in Lewes, while the pine chest was bought at a fleamarket in Herefordshire. The chandelier was found in France
Right: Furnishings in the living room provide splashes of colour: the red peony curtain fabric is by Zoffany, the terrier cushion is by Carola van Dyke and the hunting print cushions are by Caroline Zoob. The leather sofa is from Laura Ashley and the cane pitchfork is a holiday souvenir from Greece

> *'People knock on the door to tell us that they rented it up to 50 years ago, when it had outside toilets and no running water or electricity'*

Above: The bathroom has been refreshed with a bath mixer from John Lewis, antique mirror and a pine ladder used as shelves
Right: In the master bedroom, the palette is light and airy. The brass and iron bed is from Seventh Heaven. A floral eiderdown, picked up in France, subtly clashes with the bedspread, curtains and blind, all by Jane Churchill

HOME IN THE WOODS

Determination, a clear vision and helpful friends ensured Andy Singleton was able to turn a waterlogged cottage into a bewitching home in the forest

Words Naomi Jones | Styling Sian Williams | Photographs Brent Darby

This page: The delightful timber-frame cottage sits beside a lake,
The thatched roof was restored by Keith Quantrill's expert team
Opposite: Andy transforms any spare pieces of wood into shelving

THE STORY

Owner Andy Singleton, a former builder and now a writer. Andy leases the property from the Knebworth Estate
Property A Grade II-listed woodsman's cottage. The oldest part was built 400 years ago; an extension was added during the Victorian era turning the building into a folly; a detached thatched garage, which houses the boiler and utilities, was built in 2005
What he did Andy fully renovated the one-bedroom cottage, which included bringing services to site and restoring the thatched roof

Imagine taking on a costly eight-year renovation project – a damp, waterlogged thatched cottage with no services and no road access – with the knowledge that you will never own the property. It's not the sort of deal that would tempt many people; but former builder Andy Singleton was intrigued, especially by the cottage's location, in the woods and beside a lake on the Knebworth Estate in Hertfordshire.

Andy recalls: 'In 2001, the trustees of the estate advertised the cottage in *The Sunday Times*; they were looking for somebody to take on the renovation and resulting costs in exchange for a 21-year rent-free lease. They had an open day inviting people to put forward proposals, and it was eventually whittled down to me as I was able to demonstrate a track record of working on these kinds of projects.'

Although he'd never renovated a timber-frame building before, and certainly not had a chance to thatch, Andy – who is originally from Yorkshire – does have many years' experience working on period properties and stone barns in the Dales. 'We agreed a specification for the renovation,' he explains, 'however I have since exceeded that because I fell in love with the place and got a little carried away!'

Love is definitely what was needed here, because this project was an enormous undertaking. The house was in a sorry state as it hadn't been lived in at all in the 20th century; in fact, it had only ever been used on the odd occasion when family members from the estate stayed for one or two nights in the summer.

'While the trustees liked my ideas, it took three years to receive planning permission,' explains Andy. As well as being Grade II listed and part of the historic estate, the cottage is also on a Site of Special Scientific Interest: not only is it near a lake, it is also surrounded by protected plants and wildlife. 'I had an awful lot of paperwork to complete, but eventually my plans went through and work could begin to repair the ruin,' he continues. 'The thatched roof was really damp and covered in moss – there was water running down it and it was literally rotting ➤

Right: Andy built a gallery area in the dining room for his books and collection of guitars. The rustic dining table and chairs were given to him by a friend. The simple wooden bowls came from Muji – 'One day I'll learn to turn these myself,' says Andy. The tray, all the cutlery and napkins are from Sia

Above: A butler's sink sits in the corner of the galley space. Joiner friend Peter
Right: Walker installed the freestanding kitchen units (made by David Mawdsley
of Mawdsley Williams) around the black Aga

away. I went on a course hoping to replace it myself, but soon discovered there's a lot more to thatching than I thought.' So Andy hired the teacher, master thatcher Keith Quantrill and his team to restore the roof. 'While Keith was here, he taught me some more tricks of the trade,' says Andy, 'which I was able to use on the thatched garage I've built beside the cottage.'

The thatch was only one job on a very long list, though, as Andy explains: 'When the damaged plasterwork was removed I discovered that the frame was rotten all the way round, so I've replaced the sole plate and added a damp-proof course.' He also had to take out sections of timber all the way round, bit by bit, and replace them with green oak; with the help of the estate's woodland expert, Wocko Watkins, Andy felled some trees, planked them up and seasoned them. 'The majority of the timber has come from within 100 yards of the cottage,' he says.

'And as there were no public utility services,' he continues, 'I had to run in an underground electric cable.' Likewise, there was no mains water supply or septic tank; because of the lake Andy had to install an environmentally friendly tank that neutralises waste and discharges clean water. 'All in all, there were seemingly endless jobs to be done to set up a decent infrastructure,' he says.

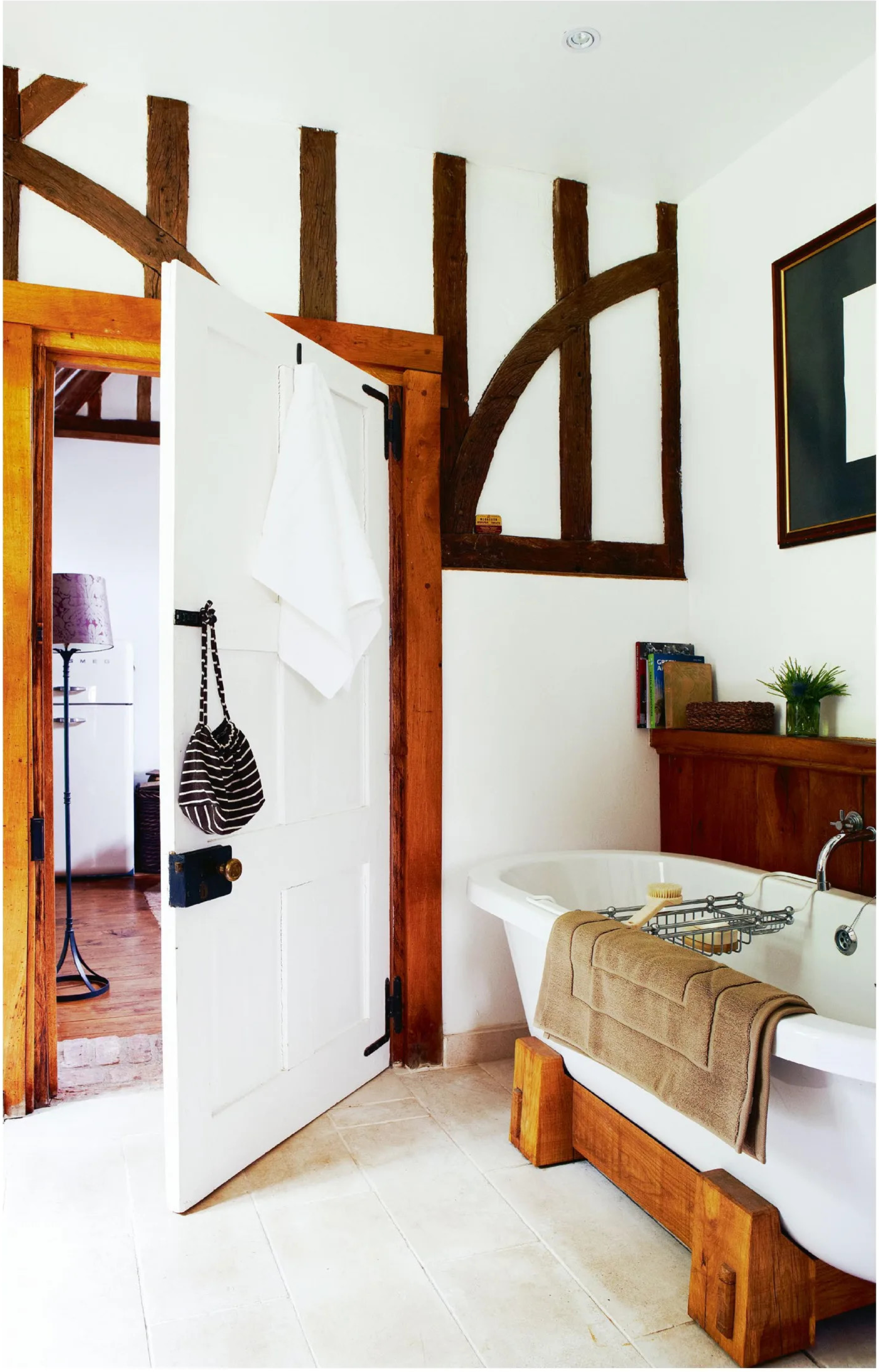
Andy has put a huge amount of effort into the project, but he's very quick to point out that he couldn't possibly have done it alone. Money has not been plentiful and his budget wouldn't stretch to calling in paid specialists for everything. 'I can't tell you how grateful I am to have had the support of my friends and family,' he says. 'This house is a tribute to all those who helped me; so many people were generous with their ideas, time or money. 'Their kindness first struck me very early on,' he continues. 'Before I could even begin the restoration, I needed to create an access road to the cottage; a few of my friends arrived to drive dumpers and diggers. I know some very useful people who I've met over the years in the building trade; others were just friends willing to lend a hand where they could. 'Phil Spencer, for example, who I've worked with on many construction projects, has done the plumbing and heating for the whole site here, with no charge for labour. Similarly, Peter Walker has been a great help, doing joinery, hanging doors, and helping me with the framework for the garage roof.'

Now that the infrastructure and the renovation are complete, Andy has been able to dust off the furniture he acquired from family and friends and the odd junk shop and begin to take it slightly easier and concentrate on his burgeoning writing career. 'I have another 10 years left here,' continues Andy, 'and can't imagine living anywhere else, although I may have to move out eventually. The day the lease runs out I've no right to be here: the trustees quite rightly pointed out it would be up to whoever was in the house at that time. I'd like to think they'd look favourably upon me because of what I've achieved, but I'm fully aware there's no guarantee of that.'

A lot of people have questioned the wisdom of putting so much time and money into something that he ultimately doesn't own; for Andy, that doesn't come into it. 'I wake up here surrounded by the woods, with that lovely lake view,' he says. 'And when I've been working away, and come back through the gates into the estate, it hits me again how lucky I am – it's like another world; you can't put a price on that.'

Right: The sitting room features a double-height ceiling, open to the timber rafters, which Andy had to restore; he also laid seasoned wood over underfloor heating in this room and made the chunky coffee table from odd pieces of wood. The fireplace and the panel above are original to the cottage

BRITAIN'S WILDLIFE PLANTS AND FLOWERS



Above: The bath sits on a stand made from wood from the site; for a similar design, try Classical Baths. The room is accessed from both the sitting room and bedroom
Right: The fine boards in the bedroom are oak from the estate's timber

LET THERE BE LIGHT

A run-down former fisherman's cottage is now a bright, modern home thanks to owner Fiona Ellis, who couldn't resist taking it on

Words Jo Peters | Styling Heather Gratton | Photographs Fiona Walker-Arnott

This page: The living room fireplace has been replastered and a stove from Carron Woodburners installed. A rustic table from Ardingly Antiques Fair sits between the two linen sofas from I Gigi, and a simple display of framed pressed flowers propped up on the mantelpiece. For a similar cowhide rug, try City Cows
Opposite: The flint exterior walls of the cottage inspired the colours and textures used inside

THE STORY

Owner Fiona Ellis, a freelance production manager, lives here with her Staffordshire bull terrier, Mint

Property A three-storey flint terraced cottage in Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, built in the 18th century

What she did Fiona had the property completely rewired and replumbed, a new boiler installed, as well as a new kitchen and bathroom. The ground floor was laid with solid oak and windows were repaired. The cottage has an open-plan ground-floor living space with dining area and separate kitchen, a staircase leading to the master bedroom and shower room, and a second flight of stairs up to a guest bedroom with a freestanding bath and study area

While visiting friends in the pretty harbour town of Shoreham-by-Sea, Fiona Ellis spotted this 18th-century flint cottage in an estate agent's window. Having lived with her beloved dog Mint in a second-floor flat for five years in nearby Brighton, she longed for a home with a garden, which she could tailor to her own modern rustic style. The fact that it was Grade II listed and had belonged to an elderly lady for many years only made her more determined to inject it with a new lease of life.

'It's listed, so I couldn't do anything structural, but as it hadn't been touched for years it needed a complete cosmetic overhaul,' recalls Fiona. 'The bathroom had been adapted with a bath lift and I don't think the previous owner had been able to use the top floor for several years. There were layers and layers of peeling wallpaper and threadbare carpets.' But despite all of this, she loved the cottage and couldn't wait to take it on. 'I like a challenge! And I could see its potential as soon as I walked through the front door. It also has a lovely east-facing garden, and is within walking distance to the shops and the station with a direct line to London.'

The cottage has undergone a complete refurbishment with everything stripped out, including the old cupboards in the kitchen, the bathroom and the water tank in the top bedroom. To save money, Fiona called on all the help she could: 'My boyfriend helped the builders strip it out – it was a mammoth task. Although the instruction to strip everything out was taken too literally, as the only newish appliance in there, the washing machine also went to the dump,' she says. Sensibly, Fiona decided to stay with friends nearby for the four months while all the work was taking place as it was so dusty, and she didn't want to slow things down by getting in the way. 'There was a point when ➤

Right: The pared-back kitchen has a large picture window above the butler's sink, overlooking the garden. The oak wall shelf was chosen to match the worktop and flooring, and the Oxford Olive Green units are by Benchmarx. Fiona loves entertaining so she installed a large Smeg stainless-steel cooker from John Lewis

Above: The dining space is kept simple with bench seating, a table from Ardingly Antiques Fair and South African Wonki Ware crockery. A French chandelier bought at Brighton Antiques Centre adds glamour
Right: The eye is led right from the front door to the back of the cottage. The living and dining rooms are linked with open stairs in between. Flooring from Newhaven Timber is laid throughout. The walls are painted in I Gigi's Bone Fresco

'I like a challenge, and I could see this cottage's potential as soon as I walked through the front door'

THE LAST PILOT

I thought it seemed to be going on for ever, especially when you see it every day,' she says. 'And the actual stripping out was difficult as there was no room for a skip, so everything had to be put into my car and taken away. I probably need a new car now!'

Because of the Grade II-listed status, Fiona was limited in making any major structural changes. However, she has made the most of any natural light by removing the old kitchen door and window, installing French doors to the garden, creating a surprising feeling of space as soon as you enter the property through the diminutive front door. Otherwise she has had to work with what was there, adding carefully chosen elements to create a calm atmosphere, all sympathetic to the age of the property, while making the most of a tight layout. Oak flooring through the living, dining and kitchen areas gives a feeling of continuity, with a neutral toned carpet in all the upstairs rooms. As with many traditional seaside cottages of this kind, the front door opens directly into the living room, so it was important to make this as cosy as possible, and a wood-burner fits perfectly into the original fireplace. Another feature fireplace in the master bedroom adds an attractive period detail. The lighting has been chosen to be versatile; dimmer switches enable the mood to be adapted for specific areas, utilising a combination of simple wall lights and glamorous French chandeliers.

The original windows have been refurbished and painted throughout, while the whole house was rewired and a new central heating system installed. In keeping with the rest of the décor, Fiona found reconditioned cast-iron radiators. As there wasn't any space for a bath in the shower room, Fiona had a freestanding bath positioned in an alcove in the guest room, in place of the old bulky water tank, creating a luxurious feel to the bedroom.

To help her get the right look, Fiona enlisted the skills of Brighton-based company I Gigi. 'I've always loved interiors but as I had a lot on at the time, I employed them to advise on layout, colours and furnishings. Their contemporary, rustic style lends itself perfectly to the cottage. I already had some furniture, but they were able to source pieces to suit the size and look of the rooms. As we were limited for space, we decided to keep the theme simple, while bringing lots of light into it. They worked on the colour scheme, which is a neutral palette but with texture, and chose furnishings made from natural materials, such as wood, linen, plaster and stone.'

Fiona loves how her contemporary cottage complements her lifestyle. 'Although it's tiny, it has a feeling of openness and light. My next plan is to put a studio at the bottom of the garden so that I can work from home more often, and spend more time here and on the beach!' ⓅⓁ

Below: A feature fireplace, sourced from Brighton Architectural Salvage, with an ornate gilt framed mirror, a family heirloom, provides a stunning focal point to the master bedroom. The walls are painted in I Gigi's Taupe Fresco

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The antique bed throw was given to Fiona by her mother, and complements the lamp from I Gigi. French lights from Brighton Antique Centre are a pretty period detail. Carpets from Shoreham Carpet Centre echo the calm colours; Fiona opted for a space-saving wet room, tiling it throughout in limestone tiles from B&Q, with a drench shower head from Bathstore. The bowl was customised to create a basin, from The Tile Depot. Chrome bib taps from Bristan complete the look; in the guest bedroom, Fiona found the perfect position for the bath by placing it in the alcove that had previously held the water tank – the angles of the brick supports juxtapose with the curves of the freestanding bath from Bathstore. The deer skin rug is from Three Angels; the eaves provide a perfect nook to create a workspace, and the pine desk was a savvy fleamarket buy

NEW YORK CITY

NEW COUNTRY CHARM

When jewellery maker Kelly Smithson and her family found this former farmworker's cottage close to the North Downs Way, they set about moulding it into their dream home

Words Pippa Blenkinsop | Styling Karen McBain | Photographs Darren Chung

Coffee
Sugar
Tea
Dualit

Above: 'I love the kitchen,' says Kelly. 'It has beautiful views of the garden.' She chose to accessorise the space with colourful patterned pieces

THE STORY

Owners Kelly Smithson, founder of jewellery brand Cabbage White England, lives here with her husband Ed, who works in the City, their son, Albie, daughter, Poppy, and Herbie the dog

Property A detached former farmworker's cottage dating back to the 1880s, set on the outskirts of Guildford, Surrey

What they did The property had been well maintained by the previous owners; Kelly and Ed have put their own creative stamp on the space and installed new bathrooms. The property has three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen-diner, two reception rooms and a home office. The couple have also converted the garage into a home studio

'We wanted more space, a large garden, and a rural feel,' says Kelly Smithson of the search for a new home she and husband Ed began back in 2006. A fairly simple task you might think, but when the search is limited to within a 30-mile radius of London, it's not that straightforward, as the couple know only too well.

Having lived in Wimbledon for 10 years, and with two young children, the couple were eager to swap city living for a more tranquil family lifestyle, but needed to be within commuting distance of London. Keen to stay on the south-west side, the pair decided to focus their hunt in and around the historic market town of Guildford in Surrey. 'It has everything you would need and it's only 35 minutes from Waterloo by train,' says Kelly. But, of course, there were plenty of other migrating city dwellers with the same idea. 'There are not many properties in central Guildford with big gardens and it was already a popular destination 10 years ago. There was hardly anything suitable coming up,' she recalls. Aware that competition was fierce, Kelly took it upon herself to phone up the local estate agents almost every day to find out if there were any new acquisitions. 'We probably looked at four in six months,' she says. 'Eventually, I called one day and this had just come onto the market, so we went to view it straight away.'

The property in question was a former farmworker's cottage, tucked away down a quiet lane, encompassed by a large landscaped garden spread over several levels and surrounded by mature trees. Combine this setting with a red-brick exterior covered in creepers and winding wisteria, complete with painted timber windows, and you have all the ingredients of a quintessential English cottage – it's no wonder that Kelly and Ed fell in love with it. ➤

Right: The couple inherited classic Shaker-style kitchen cabinets, then refreshed them with duck-egg blue paint. The dining area is finished with classic country pieces – a farmhouse table and painted church pew – paired with iconic Eames DSW chairs

ARROL'S
XX
PALE ALE
EAD

Above: The couple's Pure Evil Audrey Hepburn portrait hangs above a reupholstered antique chair
Right: The living room is decorated in Farrow & Ball's Strong White. Cream sofas and grey curtains create a neutral backdrop for the bright artworks and textiles, including a pair of graphic geometric prints by Maya Hayuk, a lambswool throw from RE, and cushions from Graham & Green

BANKSY IN
A LOVE LETTER TO THE CITY
THE ART OF NICK WALKER

'It was just so pretty and the location is perfect; it's only a 10-minute walk into Guildford town centre, yet it's right by the North Downs Way,' says Kelly. 'You can go walking out on the hills in one direction, or go down to the River Wey in the other. And although the house was smaller than we wanted, it has a big garden, which makes it feel really secluded as though you're in a country village – that's why we loved it. We were so lucky to find it.'

What the house lacked in size, it made up for in condition. 'We were happy to do up a property – we did up our last two places in Wimbledon – however, we were fortunate with this because the previous owners had looked after it so well,' says Kelly. In addition, the interior boasted plenty of original period features, including Victorian floor tiles in the hallway and beautiful timber doors throughout. 'The whole place had been stripped back and painted white; it was the perfect blank canvas for us to add our own style.

'Although we loved the rural feel, we didn't want the interior to look twee or country-cottage like,' she adds. 'It's quite a light and airy house, so we were keen to retain the calming atmosphere, but we wanted it to have a mix of old and new pieces – we like the juxtaposition of the two.'

Indeed, the completed look is an exciting blend of classic English country style with a colourful, urban twist, which not only reflects the property's semi-rural position, but marries the couple's individual styles. A muted Farrow & Ball palette, traditional prints and wallpapers from heritage British brands are enlivened with graphic contemporary art and eye-catching accessories. 'I like bright colour, but sometimes it can be a bit too overwhelming, so we chose to reserve it for soft furnishings and artworks; my husband likes street art and we have a big collection,' says Kelly.

The eclectic look is carefully carried through into each room. In the living room, a pair of portrait prints of HM the Queen and Audrey Hepburn by graffiti artist Pure Evil sit alongside an elegant antique chair upholstered in floral fabric. In the kitchen, a quarry tiled floor and country-style dining table are teamed with Mid-century Eames chairs in a range of colours, and an antique pub mirror hangs on the wall.

'With the kitchen, we wanted to create an airy, open-plan family space. My parents bought the mirror about 50 years ago from a pub in Ireland,' Kelly says. 'My dad is a good source of antiques as he is an interior designer.' She likes to use inherited pieces, but also regularly looks for antiques and vintage pieces herself: 'Ardingly near Brighton is the best fleamarket by us; it's massive.'

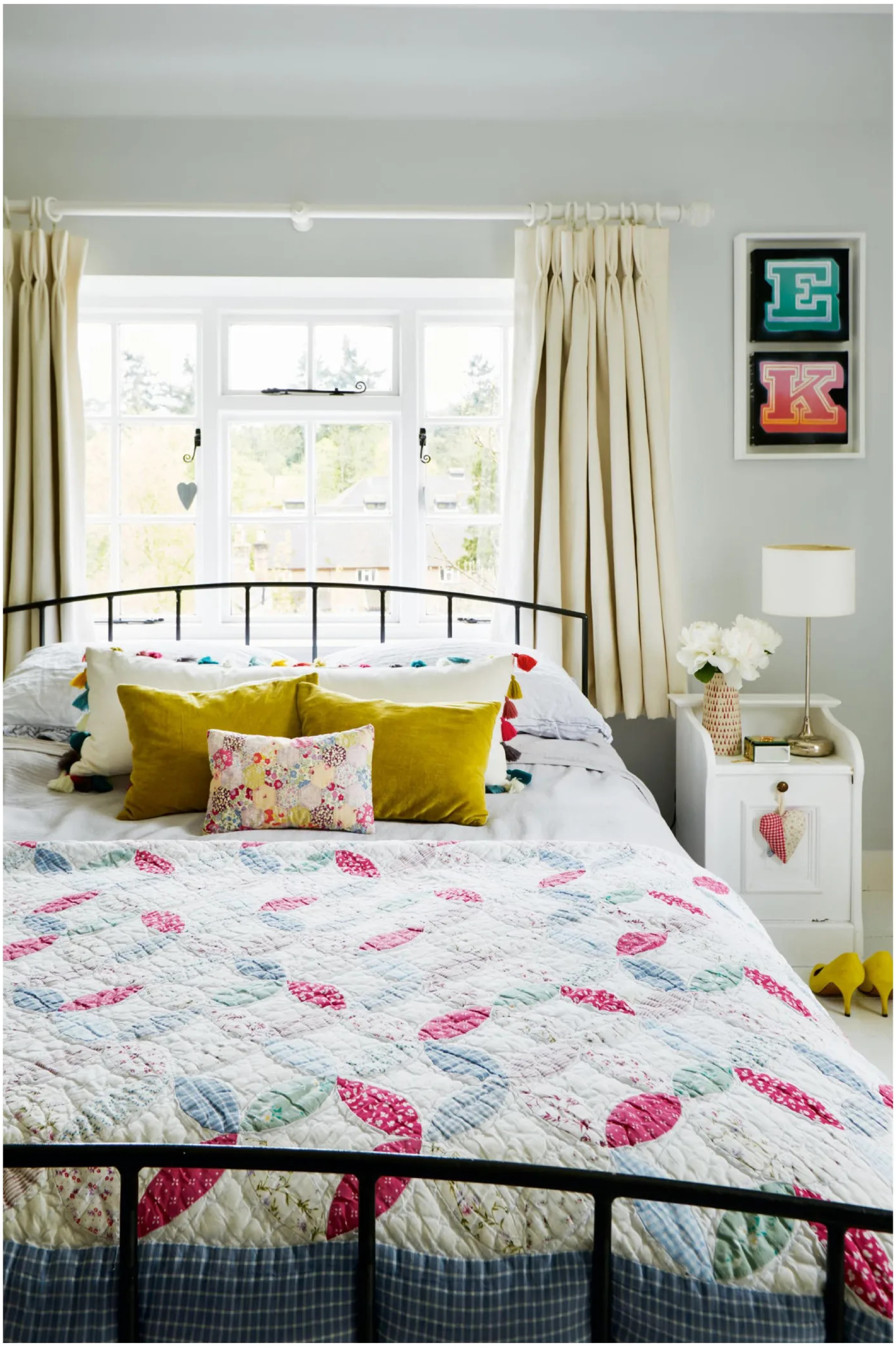
With the blending of interior styles successfully under their belt, the pair set about adapting the property into somewhere Kelly could also work. 'I used to work in central London as a TV producer, but when the children were little I wanted to be able to manage my own hours. I already had a degree in fine art, so decided to channel my creative side and take up silversmithing, which later developed into my business, Cabbage White,' she explains.

'Initially I was working from the home office, but the business has expanded and I have a couple of people working with me now, meaning we needed more space, so we decided to create a studio out of what used to be quite a dilapidated garage. It's light, airy and a lovely place to work.'

Now that the studio is complete, Kelly and Ed are looking to extend their cottage to create a more practical family layout. 'We're planning to build a larger kitchen/dining area, add another living room, a study and another bathroom,' explains Kelly. 'At the moment the utility is in a separate building, so we want to make that part of the main house, too.' It's no wonder that, having secured a sought-after, secluded setting near the city, the couple have chosen to improve, rather than move.

Right: The classic floral stripe of Zoffany's Posey wallpaper gives daughter Poppy's room an English cottage feel. Together, Kelly and Poppy découpaged the old school desk and chair

SAVE THE TREES



Above: patchwork bedspread keep the master bedroom in tune with the rural English look, while framed artworks of the couple's initials by street artist Ben Eine give a nod to their urban roots
Opposite, clockwise from top left: A print by stencil artist Martin Whatson hangs above an original fireplace in Poppy's room. Kelly reupholstered the Art-Deco style chair in Cath Kidston Polka Dot fabric; the couple installed simple white bathroom suites and furniture to keep the space light and bright; Poppy's French-style Charlotte bed came from Feather & Black. The personalised Retro Cinema Marquee Letter wall stickers from Oakene Designs at Not on the High Street add a playful touch

POPPY
ABOVE

THE LONG ROAD HOUSE

Having bought their 16th-century cob longhouse 20 years ago, Suzi and Chris Carman have taken their time to create an inviting country cottage

Words and styling Naomi Jones | Photographs Brent Darby

The Carmans' chocolate-box thatched cottage is constructed in cob, a building method that is traditionally found in Devon

THE STORY

Owners Suzi works part-time as a web administrator and sells vintage finds online (daisyrootsvintage.co.uk); she lives with her husband Chris and their two cats, Hector and Hamish

Property A Grade II-listed, 16th-century cob longhouse with four bedrooms, near Ashwater in West Devon. There are four bedrooms, one with an en suite; the family bathroom is located downstairs

What they did The walls were repaired throughout, a new heating system installed, new doors and flooring laid and an oak extension added off the kitchen

For centuries, cob has been used to build homes throughout the UK, especially in the south-west of England and Wales. One such house is Buckingham Farm – a thatched, 16th-century Devonshire longhouse bought by Suzi and Chris Carman some 20 years ago.

The property first appeared on the couple's radar when they were visiting Chris' family in West Devon. 'We spotted the house for sale in a nearby village and, although we liked the idea of living in such a traditional house, it was too expensive for us, so we went home and tried to forget about it altogether,' explains Suzi.

Back then, their home was a farm in Sussex, where Chris has run a self-livery horse yard for over 30 years, and which he visits every other week. There, the couple had brought up their two daughters, Nikki and Heidi, but when the girls both relocated to Amsterdam, the couple felt it was the perfect time to make a change and move closer to their family and friends in Devon.

'It was about a year on from first discovering the property that I saw it in my friend's local newspaper, still for sale', says Chris. 'But it was being offered at a lower price – one that we could afford this time.'

Suzi admits that they had a somewhat rose-tinted view of the property when they went to see it. 'I can remember thinking that a lick of paint, and new carpets and curtains, would sort the house out – was I wrong! There was so much work to do that the only room fit to sleep in for the first two years after we bought it was the dining room.' In the end, the longhouse proved to be an enormous hands-on renovation project that took more than a decade to complete. As well as the seemingly never-ending list of jobs to be done, the fact that both Suzi and Chris were working full time in another county, and Chris was often in another country, certainly didn't help with the ➤

Right: Just off the kitchen, the garden-room extension is awash with dappled light thanks to a grapevine growing up and through it, giving the sense of sitting outside. An Ikea sofa alongside vintage enamelware on the windowsill adds a splash of colour to the pine flooring and furniture

DAISY ROOTS
T.W. EGG PRESERVING PAIL 200
GARDENALIA
DELIA'S VEGETARIAN COLLECTION
DELIA SMITH'S SUMMER COLLECTION

Above: Two steps lead up to the main kitchen space, and a bold armchair from Ikea sets off the country classic cream-and-red colour scheme
Right: The galley kitchen has plenty of storage, with units built by a local joiner and painted in Arsenic by Farrow & Ball, which complements Suzi's collection of pink and red cookware

‘I remember thinking that a lick of paint, and new carpets and curtains, would be all it took to sort the house out’

couple's schedule. 'We both worked in the airline industry,' explains Suzi. 'Chris was part of the cabin crew for British Airways, while I worked on the ground at Gatwick for Virgin Atlantic. After every trip abroad, Chris would fly into Heathrow and drive straight down to Devon to start working on this place, jet lag and all, and I would be down every weekend. We would often meet for coffee on the A303 as it would be our only chance to catch up.'

One major priority in the renovation was warming up the chilly house. 'There was no central heating in place when we moved in, so Chris had to install it throughout the house,' says Suzi. 'The thick cob walls now help to keep the heat in during winter.' Chris also completely updated the plumbing and wiring, and replaced the rotten floors upstairs with new pine timbers.

Suzi got stuck in, too, but sometimes felt that with one step forward, the renovation would move five steps back. 'Every time I stripped off wallpaper in the bedrooms, some of the wall would fall away,' she recalls. 'Parts of the plaster behind it had been bodged with newspaper and a bit of filler, so the only thing holding it all in place was the wallpaper I was taking off. Fortunately, Chris has always been able to turn his hand to anything, so he stepped in to make everything good.'

Indeed, there was an awful lot to be 'made good', but happily, materials didn't always blow the budget. All of the oak used for new doors, windows, and the library and living room bookshelves came from the farm in Sussex. 'The big hurricane of 1987 was devastating,' Chris recalls, 'and we lost half a dozen huge oak trees that were on our land. At the time, we had them cut up and planked and left them to dry, not knowing that they would save us a fortune in timber when renovating this place.'

Green oak, meanwhile, was used for the extension – a timber-framed, vine-covered garden room. 'Seasoned oak has no movement, while unseasoned green oak still has,' explains Chris. 'It is also easier to cut and manipulate, and as it dries it shrinks, which makes the joints tighten, increasing rigidity.'

Moving into the house also allowed Suzi to indulge in one of her biggest passions: shopping. 'We sourced almost all the pieces for the house from scratch,' she says, 'except for my Victorian dressing table, which I brought from the house in Sussex. For me, the really fun part of the whole project was choosing furniture at auctions and antiques shops, and going to London to look for fabrics, paints and wallpapers.'

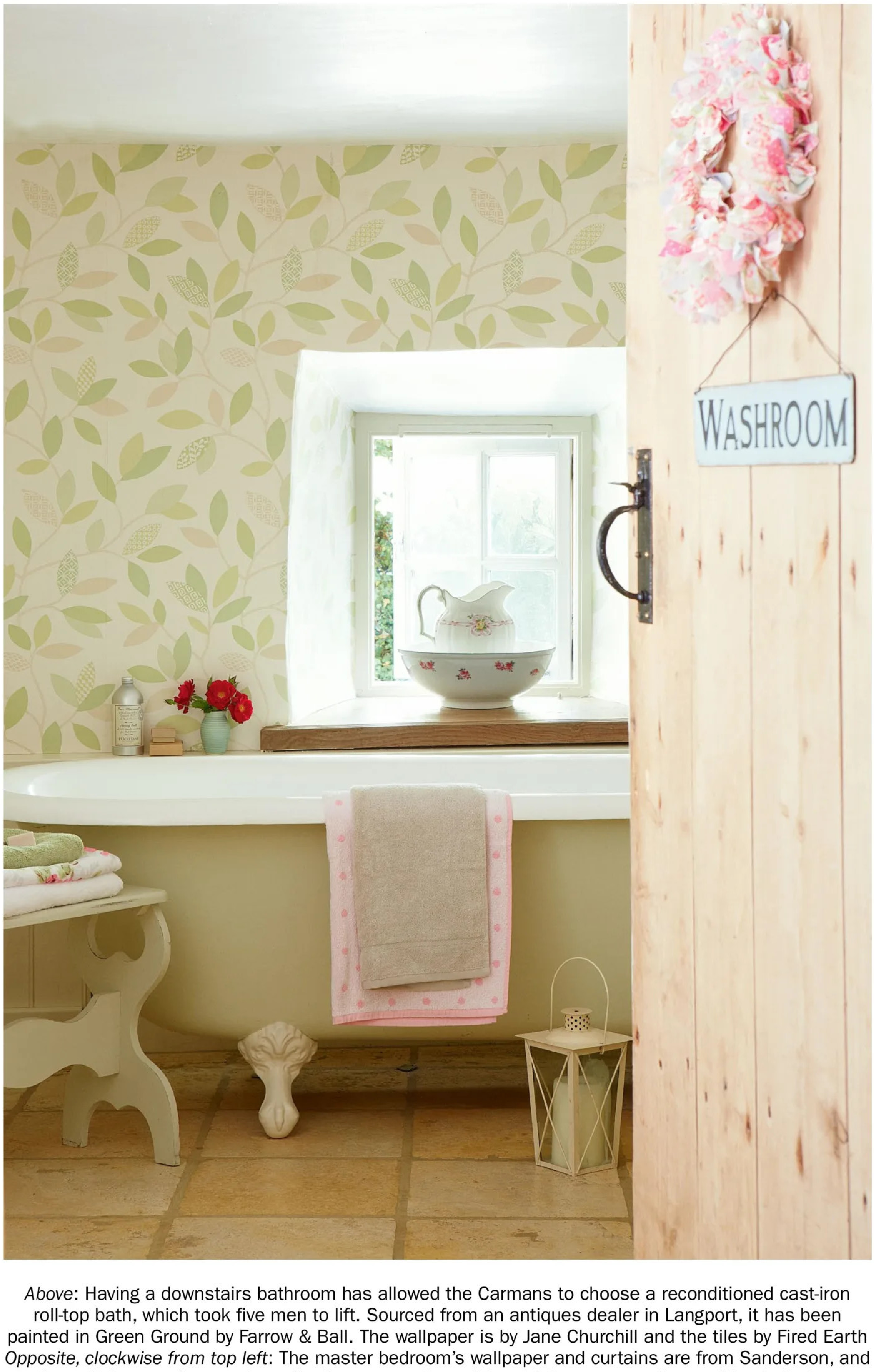
During the project Suzi even discovered a new knack for quilting. 'I found a wonderful farm where they run workshops on flower-arranging but are predominantly into patchwork and quilting,' she says. 'The owner convinced me to have a go, and although I was sceptical at first, I quickly fell in love with the idea of using fabric to make beautiful art that is useful, too.'

After almost a decade of staying at the house at weekends and during holidays, in 2002 Suzi took voluntary redundancy from Virgin Atlantic and made the move to Devon full-time. 'Chris carried on flying for another two years but then moved down permanently when he retired,' she says.

Being at the house every day made the final push to finish the renovation much easier, and now the pair are happily ensconced in Devon life. Neither Chris nor Suzi ever sit idle, however – always planning a new enterprise, working in the flower and vegetable garden or thinking of the next home-improvement project.

'I would like to knock down the wall between the kitchen and the garden room,' says Suzi. 'It would make it much lighter and I do like the idea of an open-plan space. But we both absolutely love the house as it is. We feel very privileged to live in such a beautiful, historic home and to be its caretakers for a short time in its long history.' PL

Above right: The pine-clad kitchen walls and settle are painted in Farrow & Ball's Matchstick, and the blind is by Vanessa Arbuthnott. The couple had to saw the legs off the table to take it home
Below right: A range from Rayburn fits into an alcove, while the lamp was bought in America



Above: Having a downstairs bathroom has allowed the Carmans to choose a reconditioned cast-iron roll-top bath, which took five men to lift. Sourced from an antiques dealer in Langport, it has been painted in Green Ground by Farrow & Ball. The wallpaper is by Jane Churchill and the tiles by Fired Earth *Opposite, clockwise from top left*: The master bedroom's wallpaper and curtains are from Sanderson, and the quilt is one of seamstress Suzi's own creations; 'The old drawers were from a friend of mine, Henrietta, who had an antiques shop in Okehampton. It was her mother's maid's dressing table, so if I ever want to sell them I have to give her first option.' The chair has been reupholstered in an Osborne & Little fabric, with cushions made by Suzi; she ambitiously chose to wallpaper the undulating walls in the guest room, using a design by Nina Campbell. A homemade quilt adorns the bed, along with some of her pretty floral cushions. The table lamp's shade was a gift, and the base is an upcycled junk-shop find

A VILLAGE IDYLL

You never really own an old house, just look after it for a while, says Jodie Lambert, and she and husband Nick have been doing just that – turning a charming country cottage into their perfect family home

Words and styling Sian Lewis/Narratives | Photographs Julia Toms/Narratives

The freshly sandblasted beams and fireplace give the living room a softer look. A Caroline Zoob sofa, with Laura Ashley cushions and rug, sit below paintings bought in Italy. The curtains are made up in John Lewis' Romance fabric

THE STORY

Owners Jodie Lambert, who runs a vintage stall (thecornstorepulborough.co.uk), lives here with her husband Nick, a chartered surveyor, and their six-year-old daughter, Holly

Property A part-thatched, four-bedroom, Grade II-listed cottage in the South Downs National Park, West Sussex. The property, which dates from the 17th century, was extended in the 1700s

What they did One of the three chimneys was rebuilt, and a new bathroom and kitchen installed. Interior beams and exposed brickwork were sandblasted and the whole house redecorated. Although Jodie and Nick renovated every room in the house, they have left the original layout as it was

Fate, timing and a dose of blind optimism were at play when Jodie and Nick Lambert bought their cottage in one of West Sussex's prettiest villages. 'We'd owned Victorian properties before, but had no idea what to expect with such an old house,' says Jodie. 'Which is probably why we thought it was such a good idea!'

It all started 13 years ago with a weekend away from London life. A picture in an estate agent's window of what is now their home sparked their interest on the Sunday afternoon and, unable to book a viewing, Nick took matters into his own hands. After a quick chat in the village shop, the couple found themselves walking up the cottage's crooked brick path. The owner was delighted to show them around. 'He opened the stable door into the kitchen,' says Jodie. 'We took one look at the room and both fell head over heels. It felt homely and warm, and we made an offer two days later.'

The couple made the move in October 2003, and found themselves immediately tasked with a major project. The chimney that runs up the centre of the house, between the 17th-century thatch and the 18th-century tiled roof, was in need of extensive repairs to straighten it.

Then, six months later, Jodie came home from work to find the bathroom floor had collapsed into the living room. 'Nowadays, with copper pipes, a repair would be simple,' she says. 'We struggled to find the right builders for the job, so for six months we had a wheelie bin in the middle of the room to catch the drips. One night, we had a party around it and I had to explain to guests that it wasn't some kind of art installation! It was, however, a good reason for us to tackle the bathroom, which needed updating.' ➤

Right: An old climbing rose and a wisteria frame the stable door at the front of the cottage. Jodie commissioned the house name plate from the Amberley Village Pottery; the cream outside lamp is from Garden Trading

SPINDLEWOOD

Nick found the dresser at Newark Antiques Fair and refreshed it with Farrow & Ball's Oval Room Blue. Chairs from Burford Antiques Centre and a Cath Kidston cloth complete the classic country kitchen look

'I take a plan of the house everywhere I go, as nothing in it is straight or a regular size… that's part of its charm'

Out went a green bathroom suite, and in its place the couple bought a reconditioned roll-top bath, which set the tone for the room's traditional décor. 'It's funny, because when we first bought the house, our style was very modern country,' recalls Jodie. 'But the bathroom now works with the more vintage look that has evolved as we've gone along.'

The couple soon realised that most of the work required to their cottage was lengthy, costly and very dusty, so the renovation has progressed in stages.

Sandblasting beams and the interior's exposed brick meant that Jodie and Nick had to move out, along with all their furniture, for a week. 'Even when we could go back into the house, we had to sleep on a mattress on the floor of the dining room,' Jodie explains. 'And it was just five weeks before I gave birth to our daughter Holly. It made such a difference, though: the beams look more rustic now and despite the low ceilings, the lighter colour really opens up the rooms.'

Using one main paint colour, and one carpet, throughout the downstairs of the house, Jodie has ensured that all the rooms flow from the dining room, through the living room and into the kitchen, which in this house is definitely the heart of the home. Employing a local carpenter to build units around an existing butcher's block, which according to Amberley's oldest resident came from the village butcher's, has resulted in a kitchen that looks like it's always been there.

'There's no way that a shop-bought design would have made such good use of the space,' says Jodie. 'The carpenter did a great job in filling every available corner – even the narrow gap by the fireplace, which now houses a small larder.'

Investing in a new three-oven Aga was a must for Jodie. 'Holly and I love baking,' she says. 'I collect crockery and it doesn't just sit in the dresser on display. I use it all the time to have proper tea with cake.'

Over the years, Jodie has found herself increasingly drawn to vintage styles. 'It's what Nick refers to as my "granny chic",' she laughs. Joking aside, it has led to a career change. Jodie stopped commuting to London, where she worked as a PA, when Holly was born in 2009, and three years later started a stall at a local antiques and vintage shop, selling pieces from home and picked up on family holidays to France and Dorset. 'Nick sells there, too,' she says. 'He always picks these crazy items, like a rusty anchor or old billycans, and I think they'll never sell, but they always do!'

Each holiday also means a new painting for the growing gallery on the walls of their dining room. When it comes to buying larger pieces, Jodie is always prepared. 'I take a plan of the house everywhere I go, so I know the measurements of all the alcoves,' she says. 'Nothing in this house is straight or a regular size, which is, of course, part of its charm.'

Jodie is now keen to gently tame the tumbling country garden at the back of the cottage, installing steps through the main flowerbed up onto the lawn in time to show the garden during the Amberley Open Gardens this summer. Then it's on to the windows, which need either repairing and painting, or replacing.

'We need planning permission to change them,' explains Jodie. 'It is frustrating because the windows aren't original to the house. They were probably put in during the 1960s, but because the cottage was listed after that, they are still covered by the Grade II status.'

Jodie admits that it's a constant project. 'It makes you realise you never really own an old house, you just look after it for a while,' she says, and a letter she received recently confirmed this. Addressed to the 'people who currently love Spindlewood', it came from a lady who had lived there before the owners Jodie and Nick bought it from, and who had an oil painting of the house that she was keen to return to its rightful place. 'We invited her round for tea and the painting is now framed on the dining room wall,' says Jodie. 'This house clearly has a special connection for all the people who've lived in it.' PL

Right: Built-in bookcases frame the doorway to the dining room, which houses an antique table and chairs, and carpet from Arundel Carpets

Above: The Pale Linen walls are the perfect backdrop for the pastel vintage bedspread in the guest room. For similar, try Etsy
Right: A reconditioned bath from Chadder & Co has been painted in Fired Earth's Carbon Blue, and sits on natural stone floor tiles, also from Fired Earth. Panelling in Farrow & Ball's Cooking Apple Green complements the curtains from Laura Ashley, which suit the cottage's original Crittal window

‘This house clearly has a special connection for all who have lived in it’

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